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# Japan

**Total area:**

377,873 km<sup>2</sup>

**Population:**

126,740,000 (2017)

**Literacy:**

100%

**Official languages:**

Japanese

**GDP (PPP) per capita:**

\$42,860 (2017 est.)

**Life expectancy:**

83 years

**Religions:**

52% Buddhist, 36% Shinto, 10% Muslim, 1% Christian, 1% other religions

## Prayer points

**Japanese people**

Japan is largely unevangelised as a nation, despite being open to missionaries. Pray that the gospel will take root in Japanese culture. Pray for more missionaries to hear and respond to God's call to Japan. Pray also for those who are already faithfully serving God there: that they will proclaim the gospel boldly and see the Holy Spirit open Japanese hearts to the good news of Jesus. (WEC International - September 2021)

**Christian freedoms in Japan**

"The nail that sticks out will be hammered down." This famous Japanese proverb highlights the difficulty of standing out in a group in Japan. Often people in Japan can find themselves enslaved by the expectations of others. To become a Christian may clash with family or group culture and is often considered 'not Japanese'. Pray that social pressures would not deter seekers from accepting Christ or believers from practising their faith, and for groups and hierarchies to be influenced positively by believers. (Japan Christian Link - April 2021)

**Church leaders in Japan**

Many Japanese Christian leaders are ageing, with few young people in, or pursuing, leadership roles in churches or mission organisations. There are a number of Bible colleges and other training organisations, however all report low applicant numbers with very few young people enrolling. Praise God for those young people who have already answered the call to Christian leadership and for the Bible colleges and other initiatives set up for training Christian leaders. Please pray for more of the

younger generation to step forward for leadership, for all staff offering training and for those students currently in training. (Japan Christian Link - February 2021)

### **Overseas Japanese and Returnees**

Many Japanese are more open to exploring new things while living overseas and are more likely to accept Jesus during this time. However new Christians and seekers often return home to face a challenging environment. Several organisations seek to lead Japanese to Christ while overseas and integrate them into a Christian support network upon their return. These include Japanese churches and special returnee networks. Praise God for those who meet Jesus overseas and remain in him upon their return. Please pray that Christians who meet Japanese abroad will seize the opportunity to share the gospel with them. (Japan Christian Link - December 2020)

### **Churches in Japan**

Most churches are relatively small and there can be a tendency for members to view evangelism, discipling, pastoral support, and other essential roles as the responsibilities of the pastor or leadership team. Older pastors especially feel obliged to perform most of these roles themselves, but if a role is assigned, they may not always be assigned based on an individual's gifts. Please pray for leaders to have wisdom and servant-heartedness; for the younger generation to step forward; for the wisdom of one generation of leaders to be passed down to the next; for church members to recognise and make use of their gifts and for church leaders to support and encourage their members in this. (Japan Christian Link - October 2020)

### **Japanese unreached people**

Japan is largely unevangelised as a nation, despite being open to missionaries. At the end of the Second World War, General MacArthur called for a thousand Protestant missionaries to Japan. WEC's work began as a response to that call when Lon and Yvonne Fulton arrived in Japan on October 22, 1950. Pray for the gospel to take root in Japanese culture and no longer be perceived as western. Pray for more missionaries to hear and respond to God's call to Japan. Pray, too, for those who are already faithfully serving God there: that they will proclaim the gospel boldly and see the Holy Spirit open Japanese hearts to the good news of Jesus. Read more about [WEC in Japan](#) [1] (WEC International - September 2020)

### **Overworking in Japan**

Life in a Japanese company can be incredibly demanding, largely due to Japan's group-oriented culture in which people feel bound by the expectations of their peers. Overworking is a serious problem in Japan; workers often feel obliged to work unsocial hours and taking annual leave, although permitted on paper, is seen as shameful and often avoided. Thankfully, it would appear that some companies are gradually beginning to change, but there is still a long way to go. Long working hours make it difficult for workers to find time for church or evangelistic events. Praise God for the Christians God has placed in these companies and also that the issue of overwork is starting to be addressed by the government and society as a whole. Please pray for working Christians to be effective witnesses to their colleagues and also that unhealthy expectations in the workplace will change, leading to a healthier balance between work and leisure time. (Japan Christian Link - August 2020)

### **Revival for the Church in Japan**

The church in Japan is small and ageing rapidly. Many church leaders are well past retirement age, but feel obliged to continue due to the lack of younger leaders/trainees. Please pray for their health and that they will be good witnesses to younger people. Pray for young people to become the church leaders and evangelists of the future. Christians in churches in rural areas in Japan can feel very isolated as churches and other Christians are few and far between. There can be significant pressure to conform to Japan's religious traditions of Buddhism and Shintoism, which tend to be much stronger in these areas. Pray for revival - for Christians in rural areas to find fellowship and for spiritual

strongholds held by Buddhism and Shintoism to be broken.

(Japan Christian Link - May 2020)

### **Jesus is true harmony in era of new emperor**

With a new emperor in Japan comes a new era; the Reiwa era is variously translated, but includes reference to harmony. True harmony for a nation is found when they enter into their God given destiny. Please pray that the Japanese will seek true harmony which can only be found in Christ as a prophecy has been shared: "...a stabilising anointing of my spirit in the land of cherry blossoms, to cause the shifting ground to stand still; as my People rise to stand in their appointed places..."

(Nations Trust - February 2020)

### **Pray for hope for mental health in Japan**

Japan has one of the highest suicide rates in the world. One Japanese person attempts suicide every 15 minutes. While the suicide rate in Japan has decreased somewhat recently, mental health remains a top concern. Suicide among Japanese children is the highest in the world, and suicide is the leading cause of death for young people aged 15-29. Christians in Japan, through churches and other organisations, are working to minister to those at risk. Emmanuel, the God who came to save the lost and heal the broken-hearted, is at work in Japan. Pray with us that he would work powerfully through his church in Japan to bring hope and light for those on the edge of hope. (Japan Christian Link - October 2019)

### **Shining a light for Jesus**

Many Japanese subscribe to the practices of Buddhism and Shintoism. Even if they have no real belief in either, as is often the case, Japanese will follow these customs out of respect for community traditions or under pressure from familial expectations. Shintoism is polytheistic, teaching that many aspects of life have associated 'spirits' or 'essences' to which the Japanese can appeal at many dedicated shrines scattered across the nation. Pray that the Japanese would discover that their true needs are met in the one Lord Jesus Christ. Pray for Christians from strict Buddhist or Shinto backgrounds to shine a light and lead those around them to Christ. Pray that all of the enemy's spiritual strongholds in Japan would be torn down. (Japan Christian Link - August 2019)

### **Expatriate Japanese churches**

Praise God that Japanese Christians are setting up churches outside Japan in order to serve expatriate Japanese. Pray that these churches will be a refuge for those struggling with certain aspects of living overseas. Praise God that the strong sense of community that Japanese people have is present in these churches and ask that unbelievers would be led to Jesus through this fellowship. Pray for these churches to be equipped to prepare new Japanese Christians for their return to Japan, as their new-found faith may give rise to friction, due to the many cultural and social barriers they are likely to encounter on returning home. Pray also for strong networks between overseas Japanese churches and gospel-centred churches back in Japan. (Japan Christian Link - June 2019)

### **Christian response to natural disasters**

Japan is prone to earthquakes, tsunamis, typhoons, landslides and volcanic eruptions, all of which have taken lives. Despite being well prepared for the majority of the 1,500 earthquakes which strike each year, serious incidents such as the 2011 Tohoku disaster and the recent landslides in Hiroshima can still cause devastation. Praise the Lord for Christian charities and churches, many of which have responded rapidly and effectively to the material and spiritual needs which arise from each of these events. Pray that all Christians in Japan will show Christlike love in times of need and have wisdom in knowing how best to provide support. Pray that this will lead the Japanese to Christ and that, through a relationship with him, they will find peace despite the trauma of natural disasters. (Japan Christian Link - December 2018)

### **Returning with faith**

Many Japanese come to faith while living abroad, having a greater openness to new things when

unconstrained by the norms and expectations of Japan. Praise God for all such new believers and pray that this will continue to be true through the influence of the Christians whom Japanese expats meet. Praise God for Japanese Christians taking the gospel back to Japan following their overseas conversions, but also pray for their protection. Returning Japanese new Christians are vulnerable to not only the stress of reverse culture shock, but also to difficulties finding good Christian fellowship and to opposition from friends, families and neighbourhoods more protective of Japanese traditions. Praise God and pray for all organisations set up to support these 'returnees'. (Japan Christian Link - May 2018)

### **Threat of Crisis**

Pray that the threat of crisis will lead to positive transformation in the Christian community Japan. Around 75% of local churches average fewer than 30 attendees. Declining congregations and a major shortage of recognised church leaders is forecast, reflecting the ageing population and the scarcity of both new converts and emerging leaders. Ask that church gatherings be transformed from those with western feel and traditions to become more authentically Japanese, more modern and more welcoming. Pray that many potential leaders will be developed and entrusted with responsibility in gospel ministry; that rigid denominational barriers and other hindrances will weaken, allowing for cooperation and shared resources; and that the Lord would inspire among believers the love for one another that he calls for in his new commandment (John 13:34-35). (Japan Christian Link - March 2018)

### **Christian Heritage Establishments**

A number of Japanese schools and universities were founded by Christians and still operate with a nominal Christian ethos. Although few staff at such institutions have been committed Christian believers in recent times, it often transpires that adult Japanese who become believers attended a Christian-heritage establishment in their youth. Exposure to biblical narratives can prepare young people to understand the gospel more readily when they later encounter it and also leave them less resistant to the idea of choosing to follow Christ. Pray that more Christians would aspire to positions on the teaching staff and management of Christian-heritage establishments and enhance the opportunity they present for sowing the seed of the gospel in the hearts of young people. (Japan Christian Link - January 2018)

### **Role Models for Men**

Writing on the lack of men in churches, the last edition of Operation World states that 'on average, women attendees outnumber men seven to one'. Working hours and exhaustion are factors at play, as is the self-reinforcing perception that church is mainly a place for women. Then there is the fear of what identifying as a Christian might mean for one's career. Ask the Lord to remove all the obstacles that keep men in particular from professing faith in the Lord Jesus, and from going on to follow him wholeheartedly. Pray that many good role models of men who are seriously following Christ would emerge across Japanese society; such as in the fields of business or education, blue collar or manual work, arts or healthcare. (Japan Christian Link - November 2017)

### **Great Expectations**

Japanese people often struggle to satisfy the high expectations of those around them in the workplace, sometimes to the point of sickness. Pray they will discover unconditional acceptance in Jesus. It's not uncommon to work 12 hours before being expected to socialise with colleagues very late into the night. Male company workers especially have very little time for their families or for others. Pray this work ethic will relax and that God will meet company workers, whether at or away from work. Praise the Lord that there are a few Christians in the workplace. Pray they will find time to spend with him, in fellowship with other believers and will point their colleagues to the Lord. (Japan Christian Link - July 2017)

The vast majority of Christians in Japan are women. Owing to Japanese working hours, men have very little time or energy free for church or other Christian events. The lack of Christian men is a self-reinforcing problem - few men in a church enforces the misconception that church is primarily a place for women, which in turn risks putting off other men from attending. Praise God for those Japanese men who are walking in the faith. Please pray for the Lord to remove all the obstacles that keep men in particular from professing faith in the Lord Jesus and from going on to follow him wholeheartedly. Also for many good role models of men who are seriously following Christ to emerge across Japanese society. (Japan Christian Link - )

### **Online webinars for students in Japan**

IFES East Asia team have been running a series of webinars to support the student movements in the region. KGK Japan share this prayer request: "We are grateful for the IFES East Asia webinar series. We thank God for over 30 KGK-related participants signing up for the 1st and 2nd webinars. Please pray that the webinar series may give students a taste of the IFES fellowship, a sense of solidarity with brothers and sisters around the world, and a desire to be a part of God's global work." Please also pray for the KGK team as they have had to move their summer camp content online, making it more like series of lectures. Please pray for wisdom in recruitment and organisation. (IFES - )

### **Hikikomori**

'Hikikomori are those who shut themselves off from society, reclusive in their rooms, sometimes for years. This acute social withdrawal is a particularly Japanese phenomenon possibly affecting 1% of the population. Similar numbers could be on the verge of hikikomori, meaning well over 2 million people are affected or at high risk. Causes are unclear but individuals with a strong sense of self and independent thinking can feel out of place in Japan's group-oriented and fixed-expectation society. Please pray that more Christians would want to help sufferers and their families discover their true identity and acceptance in Christ. Pray for those hikikomori who will prove gifted in leading the advance of the gospel will be led to faith in Christ and want to live for Him. (Japan Christian Link - May 2017)

### **Samurai Training Project**

In Japan there is a need for effective training for Christians, whether formally in Bible College or through other more flexible or less formal training. Pray that those with suitable leadership and teaching gifts would have courage to come forward for training and pray that effective programs for them would emerge. We do thank the Lord for a number of new training initiatives in recent years. Ultimately, pray that a growing body of young men and women disciples of Jesus will influence all corners of Japanese society for him and that these are equipped through the new Tokyo-based 'Samurai' project. Pray that all Japanese believers would find the encouragement, training and support they need in order to use their gifts in the Lord's service for his glory. (Japan Christian Link - February 2017)

### **Japanese disciples**

There is a need for effective training for Christians, whether formally in Bible College or through other more flexible or less formal training. Pray that those with appropriate leadership and teaching gifts would have courage to come forward for training and pray that effective programs for them would emerge. Thank the lord for a number of new training initiatives in recent years. Pray that the new Tokyo-based 'Samurai' project will be really effective in producing a steady stream of young men and women disciples of Jesus who will influence all corners of Japanese society for him. Pray that all Japanese believers would find the encouragement, training and equipping they need in order to use their gifts in the Lord's service for his glory. (Japan Christian Link - May 2016)

### **Japanese workplace**

Working hours and the all-encompassing nature of Japanese corporate life present a challenge to bringing the gospel to working people in Japan. Often social lives, as well as working lives, revolve

around the company, with many employees living in company housing and mixing with few outside the company. Ask God to open up ways to reach working people with the gospel. Pray that God would raise up godly Christians in the workplace who will improve perceptions of Christianity among professionals. Pray too that Christians in Japanese companies will increasingly be moved to pray for their colleagues and will be emboldened by the Holy Spirit to share the good news of Jesus with them. (Japan Christian Link - March 2016)

### **non-Christian spouses**

Many Japanese Christians have non-Christian spouses. Pray that they would remain true to their faith and that God would also give them a strong desire for the salvation of their spouse. Pray that churches would be more aware of this challenge and would find good ways to support people in this situation, seeing the great opportunity to reach husbands and wives through their Christian spouse. (Japan Christian Link - November 2015)

### **Political peace**

There has been increased spotlight on Japan's relationship with China, Korea, and the rest of the world. A combination of renewed tensions over disputed islands, the ongoing economic difficulties that Japan faces and a less pacifist perspective from politicians and other leaders, has led to louder voices of discontent (especially from the younger generation) than has typically been the case in years gone by. Attitudes towards foreigners and immigrants are varied. Pray for those in authority to act with balance and wisdom, and pray for Christians in Japan to make every effort to live peaceably with others in a way that is honouring to God as well as attractive and contagious to many who observe their day-to-day lives. (Romans 12:18). (Japan Christian Link - September 2015)

### **Within the family**

Many Japanese Christians are the only believer in their family. Non-Christian husbands often have no time at all to be able to interact with Christians or go to church. Parents are often strongly opposed to their children 'becoming non-Japanese' (Christians) and fear for their own well-being after death if their offspring won't take care of their deceased spirits. Ask God to break down these barriers to the gospel within the family environment. Pray for strengthening and patience for lone believers to stay close to God. Pray for God's protection on Christian families to stay strong, united and able to resist temptations and attacks that would seek to undermine or divide the family. Pray for significant growth of God's family, the Church, to occur through the salvation of earthly family members. (Japan Christian Link - July 2015)

### **Japanese finding Christ**

Proportionately many more Japanese become Christians outside Japan than in Japan, due partly to the many more opportunities to meet Christians. There is also a far greater openness to new ideas when away from the home culture, which is largely conformist. Pray that in this openness God would direct the steps of many Japanese into life-changing relationships with Christians. Pray that those who start a new journey of faith following Jesus overseas would be built-up on a strong foundation, that their faith would continue to grow after returning home, and that they would have significant impact for the gospel there. Pray too that God will call and send out Japanese Christians to other parts of the world to spread the good news in other places. (Japan Christian Link - May 2015)

### **A ready harvest field**

Praise God that he works constantly, in the quiet, preparing hearts to receive the truth of the gospel. Pray that he will send many workers into the ready harvest field of Japan, both from inside and outside Japan. Pray that God will raise up many young leaders within the Japanese church, that they will be people filled with confidence in their identity in Christ, passion to live a life that glorifies Christ and conviction in the life-transforming power of God's Word and his Holy Spirit. Pray that many more Japanese Christians will be equipped, encouraged and emboldened to share their faith openly with family members, co-workers and friends who are not yet believers. (Japan Christian Link - March

2015)

### **Rural churches**

Large swathes of the Japanese countryside have no church presence and, compared with the cities, there seems to be a much greater and deeper adherence to Shinto and Buddhist traditions and superstitions. Ask the Lord to send more workers into this harvest - missionaries, Japanese Christians and church planters. Rural churches can be quite small and isolated, so please pray for rich refreshment and joy for these believers in their fellowship together and daily walk with the Lord. Pray that opportunities for networking and mutual support between rural churches will increase. Pray especially that, through sharing of the gospel, the hidden chains which bind people will be broken. (Japan Christian Link - September 2014)

### **Persevering pastors**

Give thanks for the faithfulness, integrity and perseverance of pastors and churches in Japan where church growth is often slow. Ask God to encourage pastors and equip believers in being godly, radical, influential followers of Jesus wherever they go. Praise God for churches that are thriving as they equip believers for ministry and reach out effectively with the gospel. Pray for many new churches, house churches, cell groups and innovative ministries to begin this year, and for them to be characterised by God-centred, Bible-based discipleship and mission. (Japan Christian Link - May 2014)

### **Returning believers**

Pray that many of the Japanese who live overseas will have their eyes opened to the truth of the gospel during 2014 and that they will put their trust in Jesus. Ask that those new believers who return to Japan this year will do so with eagerness and boldness to serve and to witness. Pray for them to be strengthened and encouraged amidst the potential challenges of settling back into a culture and mind-set that will often be very different to what they have experienced overseas. Please pray that Japanese pastors and Christians will embrace these returnees, endeavour to understand and support them, and equip them to flourish and bless the churches, communities and workplaces they inhabit. (Japan Christian Link - March 2014)

### **A complex language**

The Japanese language is highly complex, with layers of nuance and meaning, thousands of written characters and various honorific forms corresponding to different levels of politeness. The indirect nature of the language often involves ambiguity in order to avoid causing offence, but conflict can arise through misunderstanding or lack of communication. Pray for Japanese Christians to communicate openly and with grace and understanding, both to build each other up and as a powerful witness to the people around them. Pray for missionaries to persevere with learning the language and to be effective in communicating the love of God through both word and deed. Thank God for the churches who provide English classes for Japanese who want to learn English, and pray for more opportunities for this. (Japan Christian Link - January 2014)

### **The true King**

The two main Japanese religions are often held together, with an emphasis on tradition, ritual and superstition. Shinto, indigenous to Japan, is mostly concerned with 'beginnings' (e.g. births, new job, weddings). Buddhism is associated more with 'endings' (especially funerals). Prayers and offerings made both to ancestral and local spirits are commonplace in the home and in the many shrines and temples. Praise God that he is the true King over all false gods. Pray for the light of the gospel in Japan to expose and overcome darkness, and that Japanese will recognise the true God and gladly turn to him. Pray that whole families will come to faith, especially where lone believers face opposition when they cease participating in family rituals. (Japan Christian Link - November 2013)

### **Comfort and security**

The pursuit of comfort and security in work, reputation, wealth or possessions is the day-to-day

religion of many Japanese, especially in urban areas. Yet there is also much fear for the future with long-term economic problems, ongoing concern over the effects of nuclear radiation and the possibility of more big earthquakes. Pray that materialism's emptiness will become apparent and many will seek true meaning. Pray that churches will equip believers to be bold witnesses in the workplace living in the light of eternity. Pray that the glorious riches available in Christ will be of greater desirability to those who don't yet know him and that those governed by fear will be driven to seek the truth of the gospel and experience God's perfect love which drives out all fear. (Japan Christian Link - September 2013)

### **An uncertain future**

An uncertain future lies ahead for Japan's youth. Some study as hard as their parents before them, in part under the burden of expectation for them to succeed. Others are more sceptical, not seeing the point. Many disenchanted young people are weary of the status quo and desire change, even if the response of some is to drop out of society. Thank God for an unprecedented level of openness and questioning of tradition among the younger generation, and pray that this will lead to significant interest in and response to the gospel. Pray for churches to be outward-looking and creative in exploring how to connect with young people, meeting them where they are. Pray that the gospel will be demonstrated, communicated and experienced as a dynamic, relevant power for real change. (Japan Christian Link - March 2013)

### **Reaching working people**

Despite gradual change, working hours and the all-encompassing nature of Japanese corporate life continue to be a great challenge to reaching working people in Japan. Often social lives, as well as working lives, revolve around the company, with employees even living in company housing and knowing few people outside the company. Pray therefore for God to open up ways to reach these people with the gospel. Pray especially for Christians in Japanese companies, that they would be bold in identifying with Christ and speaking of him. Ask that God would raise up good role models for working people who would improve perceptions of Christianity among professionals. Pray for the VIP Club network, whose aim is to reach Japanese working people and who hold regular meetings throughout Japan and overseas, including in London. (Japan Christian Link - September 2012)

### **Japanese overseas**

A high proportion of Japanese who become Christians, especially younger people and students, do so whilst overseas in countries such as the UK. Ask God to lead those working to reach overseas Japanese to many who are seeking hope and answers. Most Japanese new believers find it difficult to settle into a church when they return home as church culture in Japan is very different from what they experienced abroad. Pray that each one returning to Japan this year would be led to good Christian fellowship and to people who will help them grow as Christ's disciples. Ask too that Japanese churches would recognise returning new believers as a blessing and welcome them freely. (Japan Christian Link - May 2012)

### **Rural areas**

Pray for those living in rural areas in Japan. These regions retain greater adherence to Shinto and Buddhist traditions and local temples can have considerable influence in the community. There are fewer churches here than in the cities and those there are can be very small. The population is increasingly elderly as young people move away to find work. Pray for Christians in these areas, that they would find good ways to interact with the community and would actively seek to encourage one another. (Japan Christian Link - January 2011)

### **Christian witness**

The Japanese are the world's second largest unreached people group according to the newest edition of the prayer handbook Operation World, released this autumn. "Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field." (Matthew 9:38) Ask the Lord to lead more



mission-minded Christians into contact with Japanese people, whether in Japan or overseas (where Japanese people are often much more open to the gospel) and whether as traditional missionaries, or through secular jobs. (Japan Christian Link - November 2010)

### **O-Bon holiday**

Mid-August is the O-Bon holiday season in Japan when many Japanese return to their family homes and take part in ceremonies to remember their ancestors, whose spirits are said to return to the world at this time. Please pray for Christians and churches as they seek ways to honour the memory of the dead without compromising their faith. Pray too that during what is for many a rare break from work, Japanese people will be provoked to think more deeply about life and death and that they will want to know the truth about life after death. (Japan Christian Link - July 2010)

### **Outreach to city workers**

Pray for outreach to workers in large cities such as Tokyo, Osaka and Nagoya. Reaching working people is a particular challenge as the long hours rule out evening events and leave little energy for events at weekends. Some churches in places like Tokyo are starting to think of innovative ways to reach them, including whether it might be possible to run lunchtime events at companies. Pray for them as they do this, for good responses from companies, and for more churches to actively go out to people in the workplace rather than waiting for them to come to church. (Japan Christian Link - March 2010)

### **New Year**

The New Year holiday is the main holiday of the year in Japan. It is a time when families gather and often involves visiting a Shinto shrine to pray for good fortune in the coming year. Pray for Christians with non-Christian family members as they work out how to respond to the religious focus of many New Year activities without alienating their family or friends. Pray that non-Christians will reflect on life during this time of rest, that churches will be creative in reaching out to people during the New Year period and that seeds sown would bear fruit as the year unfolds. (Japan Christian Link - January 2010)

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### **Links**

[1] <http://www.wec-japan.org/>