



Japan

Nihon

Asia

Geography

Area 377,801 sq km. A 3,000 km arc of four large islands (Honshu, Hokkaido, Shikoku, Kyushu) and 3,000 small islands in NW Pacific. Mountainous; only 13% can be cultivated.

Population	Ann Gr	Density
2010	126,995,411	-0.07%
2020	123,664,363	-0.34%
2030	117,423,894	-0.56%

Capital Tokyo-Yokohama 36,669,000. **Major cities** Osaka-Kobe 11.4million; Nagoya 3.3mill; Fukuoka 2.8m; Sapporo 2.7m; Sendai 2.4m; Hiroshima 2.1m; Kyoto 1.8m. **Urbanites** 66.8%. **Pop under 15 yrs** 13%. **Life expectancy** 82.7 yrs.

Peoples

Indigenous 98.5%.

Japanese 98.5%. Sub-groups: Ryukyuan 0.8%; South American Japanese returnees 0.2%.

Ainu 0.02%. The aboriginal inhabitants who have largely lost their original languages and largely been assimilated into Japanese culture. Officially numbering just over 25,000, unofficial estimates range up to 200,000.

Foreign 1.5%. Korean 0.5%; Chinese 0.3%; Filipino 0.3%; other Asian, Western.

Illegal immigrants. Possibly 1 million Pakistani, Iranian, Bangladeshi, Filipino, Thai, Malaysian, others.

Literacy 100%. **Official language** Japanese. **All languages** 16 (including 11 Okinawan-Ryukyuan dialects). **Languages with Scriptures** 2Bi 1NT 2por 1w.i.p.

Economy

One of the world's most powerful export-oriented economies despite lack of natural resources and oil. High savings and low interest rates stimulated a massive capital investment

boom based on high property values. This property bubble burst in 1989, leading to recession and a debt crisis. What followed is known as "The Lost Decade", characterized by zero growth and higher unemployment as Japan struggled to bail out its failing banking sector. However, Japan's enormous trade surplus with the world continued. The 2008-09 worldwide recession led to Japan's first trade deficits in many years as well as its highest post-war unemployment rate (5%). Public debt is close to 200% of GDP, but private savings levels are still extremely high, protecting many individuals from the poor economic performance. The low birth rate and aging population are major societal and economic concerns for the future.

HDI Rank 10th/182. **Public debt** 172% of GDP. **Income/person** \$38,457 (81% of USA).

Politics

Constitutional monarchy with a parliamentary democracy. Years of stability and economic expansion since WWII turned Japan into an economic superpower. Rising nationalism and willingness to exert political power in the Pacific cause unease among neighbours. Numerous scandals, corruption and factional politics discredit the present political system and delay the implementation of reforms. In the general election of 2009, the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) defeated the Liberal Democrat Party (LDP), which had been in power almost continuously since WWII.

Religion

Freedom of religion is guaranteed to all by the constitution. Over 70% of Japanese claim no personal religion, but the majority follow the demands of idolatrous and ancestor-venerating Buddhism, and rituals of polytheistic Shintoism. Historically, Japanese identity is deeply tied to Shintoism, and formal disassociation from this connection is extremely difficult in a land where conformity rules. Many also follow some of the hundreds of newer religious movements that are off-shoots or interpretations of these. The main ones: *Sokka Gakkai* (10m), *Rishokoseikai* (5.5m), *Seicho no Ie* (3.7m). Therefore, figures in the table below cannot adequately show the multiple religious loyalties of the Japanese, which could be described as New Religions 24%, Buddhist 85%, Shinto 90%!

Religions	Pop %	Population	Ann Gr
Buddhist	69.59	88,376,107	-0.1%
Other	23.70	30,097,912	-0.2%
Non-religious	5.00	6,349,771	1.2%
Christian	1.54	1,955,729	-0.2%
Muslim	0.15	190,493	1.3%
Baha'i	0.02	25,399	-0.1%

Christians	Denoms	Pop %	Affiliates	Ann Gr
Protestant	155	0.44	555,000	-1.1%
Independent	37	0.25	317,000	0.9%
Anglican	1	0.04	57,000	0.0%
Catholic	1	0.40	513,000	0.2%
Orthodox	2	0.03	32,000	1.5%
Marginal	8	0.38	484,000	-0.3%

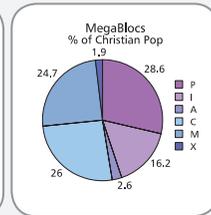
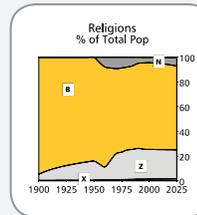
Reformed Ch in Japan	P	154	5,297	9,800
J Chr Alliance (TEAM)	P	190	6,704	9,050
Holy Ecclesia of Jesus	I	112	6,885	8,400
Baptist Union	P	70	4,420	7,028
Other denominations[159]		5,087	217,646	328,747
Total Christians[204]		15,575	1,291,021	1,958,870

Churches	MegaBloc	Congs	Members	Affiliates
Catholic Church	C	1,095	358,741	513,000
Jehovah's Witnesses	M	3,180	212,000	354,040
United Ch of Christ	P	1,730	130,769	187,000
Spirit of Jesus Church	I	624	74,850	125,000
Latter-day Saints(Mormon)	M	300	99,600	124,500
Holy Catholic Ch	A	316	28,450	56,900
Independent churches	I	751	33,786	47,300
Baptist Convention	P	335	16,875	35,100
Assemblies of God	P	215	22,800	31,000
Evang Lutheran Ch	P	160	7,267	22,020
Seventh-day Adventist	P	119	15,300	17,150
Japan Holiness Ch	P	168	5,400	13,500
J Gospel Ch of Christ	P	228	9,600	12,960
Presby Ch of Christ	P	125	5,485	12,450
Immanuel General Miss	P	123	7,029	12,300
Christian Brethren	P	165	8,500	11,200
Korean-speaking chs	P	139	6,950	10,425
English-speaking chs	P	189	6,667	10,000

TransBloc	Pop %	Population	Ann Gr
Evangelicals			
Evangelicals	0.5	596,498	-0.4%
Renewalists			
Charismatics	0.3	374,431	1.1%
Pentecostals	0.2	256,679	0.8%

Missionaries from Japan

P,I,A Estimated 300 serving outside Japan.



Answers to Prayer

- 1 Uncertainty about the future has prompted spiritual searching.** This is partly in response to many economic and social changes that threaten the status quo in Japan. The constant threats of a major earthquake, of economic decline, the widening generation gap and the feeling of social isolation (*hikikomori*) that so many suffer provoke widespread soul-searching.
- 2 Give praise for increasing openness to Christianity.** As Japan increasingly engages with the outside world, as Christian work doggedly presses on and as Japanese society itself changes, more people are opening to the gospel. A recent poll indicates that 3% of Japanese identify themselves as “Christian” (not all would truly be so, but it is indicative of changing mentalities), and 10% see Christianity as a viable religious option for themselves. Many believe Japanese society is poised for an unprecedented awakening to the gospel.
- 3 Creativity and cultural insight in ministry** are reshaping the way church and mission are being done. Many new initiatives seek to connect with the heart of Japanese mentality and culture. After centuries of outreach from a predominantly Western outlook and extremely modest church growth, new approaches are welcome and even overdue.

Challenges for Prayer

- 1 Japan is a nation facing many crises** and is a culture with no apparent direction. Accompanying this drifting is its lack of hope or confidence in the future. Pray for the following issues, all profoundly felt by Japanese society:
 - a) A lack of a moral centre.** Japan’s own leaders called it “a superpower without a moral compass”. This is most notable among young people, who struggle with particular challenges such as social phobia or social anxiety (*Hikikomori*), a suicide epidemic (over 30,000/year), bullying and teenage prostitution. High rates of suicide in other age groups and divorce also reflect this challenge.

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- b) **Political leadership** is characterized more by factional dynamics with self-seeking parties than by nation builders. The legacy of WWII hangs over and holds back the government in many ways. A recent, rapid succession of prime ministers has relatively paralyzed urgently needed reforms to address economic and birth rate issues.
- c) **Major economic transitions.** The world's third-largest economy, rocked by recessions in recent years, stands at a crossroads. The job-for-life salaried employees are becoming outdated, and the younger generation is uninterested in the type of lifelong commitment that forged Japan into an economic giant. Lack of natural resources, increasingly competitive high-tech markets and demographic changes make for an uncertain economic future. The inability (or unwillingness) of many of the younger generation, even well-educated ones, to get full-time career jobs is another recent phenomenon.
- d) **The percentage of the aged in Japan's population is rapidly increasing** (faster than any other nation), with one of the world's lowest birth rates and highest life expectancies. By 2055, half of Japanese will be pensioners – an unprecedented demographic situation and a monumental economic challenge. Caring for the elderly already accounts for the majority of the health budget.
- e) **Crime rates have significantly increased** in recent years. Japan used to be one of the world's safest places, but the recent influx of foreign criminal elements, the influence of the yakuza mafia, the rapid growth of random, meaningless violent crime and the unpreparedness of the state and police to counter these changes combine to cause many Japanese to feel stressed and no longer safe.

2 Spiritual openness is mitigated by hindrances to the gospel. There are several ways in which the eyes of the Japanese are blinded to the good news:

- a) **The spiritual powers and principalities** that exercise authority in Japan have never been decisively challenged. The powers associated with idolatry in temples and ancestor worship in homes prevail, even in modernistic, “non-religious” Japan. Japanese Christians face notable social and family pressures to conform to Shinto practices, particularly at the New Year and during funerals. Additionally, too many Christians are either ignorant or in denial of the very real spiritual battle.
- b) **The Bible is alien to the worldview of the Japanese** – the concept of a Creator God is foreign to most. Strong pressure to conform to the norm causes many new believers to compromise or eventually fall away. The shame/honour mentality held by many Japanese is a different paradigm from that of most missionaries to Japan. Christians new and old must be disciplined to have their entire worldview transformed.
- c) **The persistent influence of nationalistic Shintoism**, which is hostile to anything ‘un-Japanese’ and compromises Christians involved with it. Pray for Christians to stand firm in Jesus against this pervasive spiritual force.
- d) **Socio-economic life.** The sincere, polite, hardworking Japanese are too busy to give heed to the gospel. Materialism, very much on the rise, dominates the ambitions of most younger people. Only 10% believe in the existence of a personal God; only 50% have ever even desired help from God or gods.
- e) **New religions.** The Japan-based Buddhist lay movement *Sokka Gakkai* has grown to include 10 million affiliates. Scores of new religions are started each year – many based on the occult, worship of extraterrestrial aliens and so on. Their excesses, mind-control and brainwashing are well documented in the national media. Pray for the removal of a spirit of delusion. The 1995 gas attack on the Tokyo subway by the *Aum Shinrikyo* sect reaffirmed to many the danger of deviating from traditional Shinto sensibilities.

3 The Church in Japan experienced growth between 1945 and 1960, but both Catholic and Protestant percentages have increased only marginally since then, with conversions only just exceeding backslidings. It is believed that half of those baptized in Japan leave their churches within two or three years. The decisive breakthrough has yet to come, so pray for:

- a) **The United Church** – a union of all Protestant churches formed under duress during WWII. Almost all compromised with Shinto and emperor worship, losing their spiritual vitality. After the war, many groups pulled out to form their own denominations. The United Church, and subsequently many other denominations, issued statements repenting of their participation in war and idol worship during the war. The ethos of repentance is widely held by Japanese Christians, and many believe that a truly national-level repentance for this sad episode is a key for spiritual breakthrough.

- b) **The growing evangelical witness.** In 1950, evangelicals were 40% of Protestants and Independents; in 2010, they measured 67%. The Japan Evangelical Association (JEA) is one major coordinating body for the many denominations.
- c) **Quasi-Christian groups** such as Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons have grown far faster than evangelicals or Catholics and are the largest and most visible "Christian" presence in many areas, numbering nearly as many as Protestants or Catholics. There are several agencies committed to helping JW's to faith in Christ, but overall, there is little ministry devoted to pointing these people toward biblical faith.

4 Specific challenges facing the Church:

- a) **Christianity is still regarded as an outside, Western religion** rather than a universal faith with the capacity to be truly Japanese. This is despite 500 years of Christian presence in Japan. This also allows for confusion between various Western cultural imports and genuinely Christian expressions of the good news.
- b) **The minority complex.** Christians are a tiny minority in a society where consensus and conformity are important. Too few families come to faith, and too many individuals feel exposed. Pray for the Church to reach the size of critical mass and native character that will give it social credence and acceptability.
- c) **Unity is lacking in a Church** that numbers only 1.5% of the population. Literally hundreds of denominations and groups exist along very fragmented lines. Such organizational and theological divides and lack of nationwide cooperation hamper progress and increase attrition rates. The United Church and the JEA have started enjoying much improved relations.
- d) **A new way of doing church needs to be discovered.** Too often traditions and forms of worship have authority nearly equal to the Bible itself. Nonessential forms of the Church must be adapted to look less like the introduced Western culture of years past and more like 21st-century Japan. House churches are another way of reaching Japanese who are uncomfortable with being part of traditional churches.
- e) **The strong Confucian tradition in Japan** has admirably created a society with high ethical standards; the need for the Church to maintain these standards as a minimum can often lead congregations into legalism.
- f) **Non-active membership and backsliding.** Church attendance is low; less than half of church members regularly attend. Often, Christians are influenced by the Buddhist/Shinto religions, which have no regular attendance requirements, and they carry this thinking into Christian activities. Although evangelicals number up to 0.5% of the population, regular Protestant church attendance may be less than half of that.
- g) **Too few viable, active congregations.** At least 70% of all churches have an average attendance of less than 30. Too much is expected of the pastor. Pray for pastors willing to activate lay people to engage in persistent, innovative outreach to non-Christians. Most churches will not have even one baptism in any given year!
- h) **The lack of men in churches.** The drive for success and desire to satisfy the demands of employers make it hard for men to openly identify with and become active in a church. On average, women attenders outnumber men 7 to 1.

5 The impact of the Japanese Church on the nation is inadequate. The Church must turn from its insular, bunker mentality to engage with society. The government is not adequately solving the social ills confronting Japan; the transforming power of Christ, as expressed through a revived Church, is an answer not being adequately offered. There is, however, a new emphasis on evangelism in many churches and a willingness to try new paradigms of ministry. Pray for Christianity to have a massive and redemptive impact on the nation.

6 Bible training for Christian workers is vitally needed and provided by 125 denominational and interdenominational seminaries and Bible schools. Pray for a new generation of pastors; 70% are over age 50. Leadership transition can be difficult and sensitive in a society that so reveres the elderly. Particularly notable are Asian Access's Japan Growth Institute (where 1% of Japan's pastors have been trained – but that 1% accounts for 90% of church growth in the country) and JEMA's Church Planting Institute. A number of theological institutions are also doing admirable work. Financial constraints are

one of the biggest challenges facing students/pastors; pray for provision.

7 The missions vision of Japanese Christians is noteworthy. There are up to 300 Japanese serving in 34 lands around the world. However, churches generally have little vision for missions and little understanding of the challenges facing cross-cultural missionaries. Mission training programmes for prospective Japanese missionaries are increasing, both in Japanese and in English. The Japanese Overseas Missions Association has a membership of over 20 Japanese agencies.

8 Mission to Japan – Japan is the largest unevangelized nation that is completely open to missionaries. Yet, due to spiritual, socio-cultural, linguistic and financial difficulties, becoming an effective minister of the gospel is a long, hard process of adaptation.

- a) **Cooperation among mission agencies** has been limited in the past and, while improved, still needs greater unity today. JEMA is a coordinating body for 46 mission organizations, representing over 1,100 missionaries. Most are involved in church planting and evangelism, but real church growth is elusive. Pray for strategic insight, for the anointing of the Spirit and for fruitful collaboration. The profusion of agencies and nationalities defies listing here. Largest missions: **OMF**, **TEAM**, Pac Rim/**IMB**, **SEND**, JCCC(**CCCI**), **MTW**), **BIM**, Asian Access, Every Nation, UMC, **WEC**, **AoG** USA, Mission to Unreached Peoples and Navigators.
- b) **Opportunities for missionary service** are many, the most needful being evangelism, teaching, and planting and serving churches. Many missionaries are involved with existing congregations, assisting them to become reproductive through church planting and discipleship training. Teaching English is a wide-open door for tentmakers, with hundreds if not thousands of positions available. Long-term missionaries are the greater need because of the years needed to acquire the language and understand the culture.
- c) **The growing contribution of Korean missionaries** is remarkable in light of historic animosities; they need special prayer cover to adapt well and have effective ministries.
- d) **Japanese returnees** who became believers overseas are a hugely strategic group. Over a million Japanese live abroad; their numbers are greatest in the USA, Brazil and China. Every year, over 1,600 return home having encountered Jesus, many with a missional burden for their homeland. Japanese who return home having become Christians abroad struggle to integrate into the native church scene. Japanese Christian Fellowship Network, Japan Christian Link, Reaching Japanese for Christ, Friends International UK and several other ministries focus on this challenge. Pray for good coordination between ministries reaching Japanese abroad and those helping returnees to reintegrate into Japanese life. Pray for returning Christians to have a major impact on church life.

9 The less-evangelized areas and peoples of Japan:

- a) **There are 24 cities in Japan with no church at all**, including Akabira, Utashinai, Obanzawa, Mino, Motosu, Inabe, Akitakata, Matsuura, Kamiamakusa and Kaseda. Of the 1,020 towns and villages, 595 have no church. Pray for a church planting movement that will penetrate these unreached areas.
- b) **Numerous rural areas are scarcely touched with the gospel.** The Japanese Church has little vision for reaching out to the many towns with minimal or no Christian presence.
- c) **The ruling elite have been minimally influenced by the gospel.** Pray for the emperor and royal family, cocooned in tradition and committed, by their position, to Shintoism. Pray for politicians and businessmen, those in control of finance and industry who have such global impact. There are some ministries aimed at them; the most dynamic among these is the VIP Club.
- d) **Koreans** are descendants of those forcibly taken to Japan between 1903 and 1945. They are generally poorly treated and are classified as resident aliens – even into their third and fourth generations. The Korean community is sharply divided in their allegiance to either North or South Korea. South Korean missionaries have planted over 500 churches among them, but the percentage of Christians is lower than that of South Korea.
- e) **Chinese**, who number 25,000, but perhaps twice that when including illegal immigrants. There are about 30 Chinese churches only, with fewer than 2,000 believers. Japan probably has the least-evangelized Chinese population of almost any nation. **OMF** and **AoG** are just two of the agencies focused on them.
- f) **The Ainu**, ethnically unrelated to the Japanese, first settled in north Japan. They number as few as

25,000, and their heritage is at risk of extinction. The number of Ainu believers (if any) is unknown, and specific outreach is necessary.

g) Exploited women and their exploiters. The yakuza criminal network has actively imported 200,000 foreign women to become sex-slaves, usually through debt bondage. There are an estimated 100,000 Thai and also many Filipina women involved. Sex crimes against children are rapidly rising; Japanese men remain a significant source of the demand for prostitution of women and children across East and Southeast Asia. Child pornography is another polluting and exploitative evil that must be brought down through prayer and action. Pray for this evil system to be halted and for these tragically exploited women and children to be liberated at every level.

h) Muslims have increased through legal and illegal immigration of Bangladeshis, Malays, Iranians, Pakistanis and others. Some Japanese have become Muslim, largely through marriage. Little is being done to reach them.

10 Young people are becoming a “rare” breed due to Japan’s low birth rate. The bonds that once held Japanese society together have rapidly dissolved, and the youngest generation are the most obvious casualties. Fully 85% of Japanese teens wonder why they exist at all, and 11% wish they had never been born. Those aged 18 to 23 are the most open to the gospel; the previously mentioned troubles that Japanese youth face explain their openness, but few actually become active believers. Student witness is one of the most strategic for the future of the Church. There are more than 3 million tertiary students in over 1,200 campuses. KGK (IFES) works on 250 of these. CCCI has 90 missionaries and 47 national staff, Navigators has 65 workers. YWAM and AoG are also involved in student ministry.

11 The greying of Japan is a serious demographic challenge, now and in the future. But it also makes for a greater opportunity to share Jesus, as many search for spiritual peace. Christian nursing homes and hospices will be strategic; pray for more to be opened. Christian care workers are also going to be in high demand, creating a clear tentmaking/mission opportunity for believers from other nations, such as the Philippines.

12 Christian literature. In no other country of the world is literature more appropriate for evangelism. A highly literate, reading, commuting society offers an excellent market for publishing and distributing high-quality Christian literature. Pray for:

a) More Christian writers of evangelistic and apologetic literature who can communicate with non-Christian enquirers.

b) Scripture distribution. The Gideons and The Bible Society cooperate to distribute nearly 2 million Bibles and NTs each year – another 1 million are sold. A new translation of the Bible in 2003 has been a blessing to this effort. Despite a significant minority of Japanese owning Scriptures, understanding this alien message is a challenge for most.

c) Manga (graphic novels) accounts for a third of all published books and magazines in Japan. *The Manga Bible*, the *Manga Messiah* and other Christian manga publications – including “The Gospel Edition” manga comic book, which prints 2 million copies per year – are therefore crucially important in reaching the Japanese.

d) Christian bookstores number over 100, with several large networks, including Word of Life (14 stores) and CLC (9 stores), websites and a bookmobile ministry.

e) Evangelistic literature. New Life League may be the largest producer of literature in Asia, producing 15 million pieces of literature annually for Japan, Asia and Eastern Europe. EHC has distributed nearly 200 million tracts over the years.

f) Word of Life Press Ministries (Swedish Alliance Mission) is Japan’s largest non-profit publisher, with 190 Japanese Christian staff. Its 12 semi-independent divisions publish Bibles, books, music, videos, cassettes, CDs, computer software, Christian education materials, church supplies, two monthly magazines, a quarterly journal for pastors, tracts, gifts, cards and a weekly newspaper. It has a vital role in evangelicalism in Japan.

13 Christian media are very valuable in technologically astute Japan. Pray for these:

a) The Internet has opened many new streams of media. There are many sites for Japanese, from teaching and discipling of believers to apologetics and pre-evangelism. Congregations’ websites are one major way that seekers find local churches.

- b) *Arts*, both traditional and modern, are important to this sophisticated culture. Christians in the Arts Network encourages, connects and mobilizes artistic endeavours in the Church.
- c) *Video and film*. Redemptive Films is a studio producing much-needed Christian films, and is a part of Christians in the Arts Network. The JESUS film is available in many formats. Pray for the distribution drive every Christmas.
- d) *Christian TV and radio* are widely available for the tech-savvy Japanese. Light of the World, Harvest Time and Calvary Chapel Hours are three well-known programmes with millions of viewers. There are many ministries broadcasting or producing programmes for radio (shortwave, medium wave, FM and Internet radio). These include, but are not limited to, **FEBC**, **TEAM**, **TWR**, **HCJB**, Japan Mission, Lutheran Hour, Bible Broadcasting Network and BBI/Friendship Radio.
- e) *Christian music*, particularly Black Gospel choirs, has an enthusiastic following in Japan. Many non-Christian Japanese sing in Black Gospel choirs; Hallelujah Gospel Family is a growing network of 35 gospel choirs with over 600 members – over 80% are non-Christian. Christmas music is also a popular contact point for the gospel in mainstream Japanese society.