

Japan Update

Autumn 2021 Number 81



Power of Prayer: Photo from Bless Japan Conference 2019

Move of prayer now



**Akira
Mori**

*Prayer Ministry
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At the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games, Japan won more medals than ever. There would have been far more rejoicing in the land had it not taken place in the shadow of the COVID-19 pandemic. The focus domestically may have been a little diffused in relation to the Olympics, but the focus of Christians and churches around the world was very much on Japan through prayer.

The Japan International Sports Partnership (JiSP) had been preparing for a massive outreach for the gospel during the Olympics, only to find one door after another going shut due to COVID-19. Only one door remained open, and that was prayer. One of JiSP's co-workers, a missionary from Australia, suggested mobilizing one million hours of prayer

worldwide for Japan and the Olympics. JiSP invited JEMA to join in the effort. It all started rolling in the beginning of June, and the first press release was issued on July 9. A website to support this effort was up in the middle of July. Individual Christians and churches in Japan and around the world have been signing up ever since. As of August 5, more than 240,000 hours of prayer had been registered through www.japan1million.com.

The number of hours was not so much of an issue. United global prayer for the greatest ever spiritual awakening in Japan was—and still is. For more than 150 years, Japan has been prayed for by countless numbers of believers around the world. For each missionary who ministered in the past and for those who are ministering still, there were—and are—hundreds of prayer warriors. Also for those unspoken heroes, Japan1Million Prayer highlighted God's *kairos* moment for Japan. That is my conviction. And hundreds of those who have joined in Japan1Million continue to pray for Japan!

One year prior to the Olympics, the Nationwide Prayer Gathering Online

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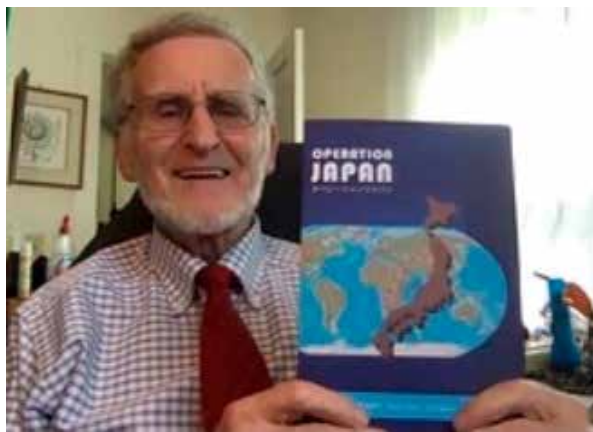
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Keeping the prayer torch aflame

Don Wright and Sarah Chang

For over 25 years, Don Wright, retired Japan missionary, has been tirelessly updating Operation Japan Prayer Guide (OJ), a system for praying through the nation in one year while also praying for key prayer targets and issues. The 5th edition was published in 2019 in both paper and ebook format. OJ was one of the things that inspired Sarah Chang, a young missionary to Japan, to eventually help compile Beneath the Surface (BTS), a booklet that presents 30 ways to pray for Japan. As a result of collaboration among many people and organizations, BTS was published by OMF International in 2020.

Japan Update invited Don and Sarah to talk about how God encouraged them through the tedious process of putting these resources together, and more. Excerpts follow.



Don Wright with Operation Japan

Sarah (S): Could you share about the birth of OJ?

Don (D): Operation World (OW) is the birth place of OJ. OW really changed my personal prayer life. I realized that I had never prayed from Hokkaido to Okinawa.

I began to talk with some people involved with the JEA and the Japan Evangelical Missionary Association (JEMA). Pastor Haruo Mitsumori, and Mr. Yukio Hanazono of Church Information Service (now Japan Missions Research) got excited in particular. Mitsumori put together the framework of OJ that still exists. Hanazono agreed to help me with statistics.

So the first edition was published in 1997 in Japanese and English. Mitsumori wrote the Japanese edition, and we got it translated into English. The 4th and 5th editions were written in English, and the Japanese translation has been made available online.

S: How has God sustained you and your vision for all these years?



Sarah Chang with Beneath the Surface

D: In Japan, it is often difficult to see sustainable evidence that God is working through our prayers. One of the greatest encouragements I've had came from a fellow I met. While studying at a seminary in the U.S., this fellow took a copy of OJ on a retreat. He prayed through OJ, and God put such a burden on his heart that he became a missionary to Japan.

Now, how did BTS come about?

S: During my first term in Japan, I was so busy that I almost got burned out. I remember, toward the end of that term, God convicted me to pray more. During my home assignment, my thoughts kept going back to prayer mobilization, something that my mission organization Pioneers, and my previous team leader at CBI had encouraged me about. I came to know OJ. It was obvious that many were praying for and were interested in Japan. How can we mobilize these people to the frontline of prayer?

That is how the idea of publishing a prayer resource about Japan was formed. The booklet would be a fruit of collaboration of many organizations, so that any Christian could use it. I worked together with Lorna Ferguson and Wendy Marshall, two OMF missionaries in Japan who had worked on a previous guide for OMF. We decided to make it a thematic prayer guide for Japan. A JEMA survey revealed major prayer needs. We narrowed them down to 30 topics, and sought writers to write a short article about each topic. It was a long process, until it was finally published. It's such a small thing, but in God's hand, I know he can multiply it to bless many people.

D: I was impressed with the design. All these pictures and colors! An outstanding job!

By the way, thanks to technology, we can go on a virtual mission trip to Japan. But prayer transcends geographic distances. In prayer, we can prayer walk anywhere in Japan.

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(Move of prayer now continued from page 1)

(NPGO) took off. Inspired by the online global prayer gathering called Movement Day* that took place in March 2020, the JEMA Prayer Ministry, wholeheartedly backed by the JEMA Leadership Team, invited foreign missionaries and Japanese pastors and leaders to come together online to pray for Japan. The first online meeting happened on August 11, 2020. Nearly 80 people joined from 17 prefectures as well as from the U.S., Australia, Singapore, Korea, and Thailand. Feedback from the participants was gratifying. We realized there had been a deep longing in the hearts of many of God's ministers to pray together for Japan in one accord across denominations and differences. One Japanese pastor who attended the gathering told me he was both inspired and filled with thankfulness to hear the love and passion of missionaries for Japan.

The NPGO was held two more times in 2020, and then became regular in 2021. From the January 26 gathering on, it has been held on the last Tuesday of every other month. Attendance varies but the heart for prayer for Japan remains the same. Prayer meetings online are not the same as physically coming together to pray, we know. Under the present circumstances,

though, online prayer gatherings seem to be one of the God-given initiatives that are effective. The NPGO's aim for the 90 minutes is to pray for the majority of the time. Participants pray in groups (breakout rooms) for 60 minutes or more. Faith is rising in hearts that God will bring unprecedented transformation in every sphere of life in Japan because of his mercy in response to the prayers of his children. Japan will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord someday, maybe sooner than we imagine.

The NPGO is bilingual in English and Japanese. If you are interested in joining, please contact the JEMA office <jema-info@jema.org>.

*Movement Day is a gospel movement started in 2010 out of New York City. It has spread into all continents since and is growing. The focus of this movement is to catalyze Christian leaders to spiritually and socially impact the urban centers in which they live, work, and do ministry. This is accomplished through connecting, unifying, equipping, and motivating diverse leaders who share common goals.

(Keeping the prayer torch aflame continued from page 2)



S: That's very true. I am about to complete my second term in Japan. One of the things I want to do during my upcoming home assignment is to pray with others for Japan. I believe that no prayer in faith is wasted!

D: That's a brilliant quote! I am hoping to republish the Japanese version of OJ in 2021. Until recently, I felt OJ was meant to die with

me. And then, I began to talk with a computer guy about making OJ an online presence, and about open source revisions. So, we will see.

S: As for BTS, we just completed the ebook version. We are thinking of translating BTS into a few other languages and doing more with it in 2022.

D: Maybe OJ and BTS can collaborate in developing



a web presence about prayer for Japan. The Kingdom is too big to be broken up into little silos.

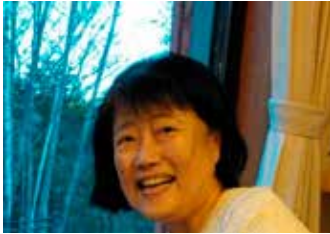
S: I agree!

*Operation Japan Prayer Guide-5th Edition
¥1,079 on amazon.co.jp

*Beneath the Surface
Visit japanprayerguide.com for purchase information.

Called to be an intercessor

Kaoru Ishii, Japan Campus Crusade for Christ



My most vivid prayer encounter happened during debriefing from a summer mission trip almost 30 years ago.

One of us shared that she fell in sick the very first day of the program and could not recover until the very last day. She felt very sorry for her teammates and her church friends who donated for the trip. She felt miserable staying in bed all day. She started complaining to God about why he allowed this situation without healing her, and then she prayed for her teammates, the people her teammates were sharing the gospel with, and for the salvation of those people. She shared all of this with tears. Then the leader of the meeting interrupted her. Checking a statistics sheet in her hand she said, “Can I share something? Your team’s statistics surpass every other team’s—way ahead in gospel presentations, the number of people who prayed to receive Christ, the number of follow-up request cards . . . I believe this is because you prayed every single day from your bed.” Writing about this still brings me goosebumps and tears.

Another occasion happened during my third year in the U.S. I was attending a student ministry in Eugene, Oregon, and we had a weekly prayer gathering every Friday morning. The average attendance was about 10 people. A change happened when my Bible study mate took charge of the prayer time. She moved the prayer room from the Student Center to her dormitory’s living room, which was big enough to hold 50 people. This arrangement brought a significant flow of students to the prayer time since many of them were living in the same building. It also caused another flow. As more students attended the Friday morning prayer time, more students joined our Friday night evangelistic program. This lasted throughout the school year and all the students and staff were excited to watch how God had worked through prayer.

I got married and had a son named Sho. Leukemia attacked his body just before his second birthday. The chemotherapy went well and other than the loss of his hair, he did not go through any painful side effects. He was a miracle baby—always smiling. He came back home after only a four month hospital stay, which was record time.

Things did not go well though. I was afraid of when

a relapse might occur and it did two years later. This time Sho got a bone marrow transplant from his sister as well as chemotherapy. All of the treatments took so much longer than the first time, but we believed everything had worked well. Then all of a sudden Sho went home to heaven.

We were devastated. I don’t remember how I spent each day or how I went back to a normal schedule. I just kept myself busy as the mother of my fourth grade daughter. I felt like I was being carried by an unseen hand for a long time, probably years. I can’t describe the details, since my heart aches even after 16 years. Very recently I have realized that the unseen hand was the countless numbers of prayers.

Many meetings moved to Zoom due to this pandemic, and the Zoom meetings gave me opportunities to talk to people with whom otherwise I would not have a chance to talk. Some of them shared that they had prayed for my family and especially for Sho and they said they are still praying for us. At first I did not understand what they meant, but gradually the Holy Spirit opened my heart to see. There have been many people praying for us not just while Sho was hospitalized but even after. Their prayers carried us with the Holy Spirit when we were the most devastated. Their prayers protected us from having a root of bitterness from losing Sho. Their prayers gave us the strength to wake up every morning to do the day’s work. Their prayers helped me be a mother to my fourth grader and to give her positive words when she left for school—even soon after Sho’s funeral. Their prayers are always connected to God’s love. This is how I see prayer now: as a special tool to bring God’s love, strength, encouragement, and healing . . . and the peace to admire His creation.

About five years prior to this heart-opening experience, the Lord led me to a prayer workshop in Thailand. This was the first conference I was able to attend overseas and I was blessed greatly by spending time with staff members from Taiwan, Singapore, Korea and many more. I was fascinated to hear many testimonies of how prayer had played an important role in expanding ministries. I heard how they have a prayer team for each ministry, and my prayer is that God would send workers to us who have special burden to pray so that we have a prayer team for at least each city team.

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AEA Women Leaders Conference 2021

Yuri Nakano, JEA Women Commission



The AEA Women's Conference was held online via Zoom for the first time this year due to the pandemic. The positive result was, of course, the accessibility of the conference to many more women all around Asia. It was also my first time to

attend a conference that spans participation of 15 Asian countries and over 130 participants. In a time when "disconnected" has been a theme, during this pandemic it was refreshing to be "connected" in an otherwise impossible way. Sisters in Christ from all over Asia were united to look to Jesus, praise him, and pray to him together. The theme of the conference was: Let Us Soar! (Isaiah 40:31) and many of the topics focused on how to thrive and soar as women leaders during this world pandemic.

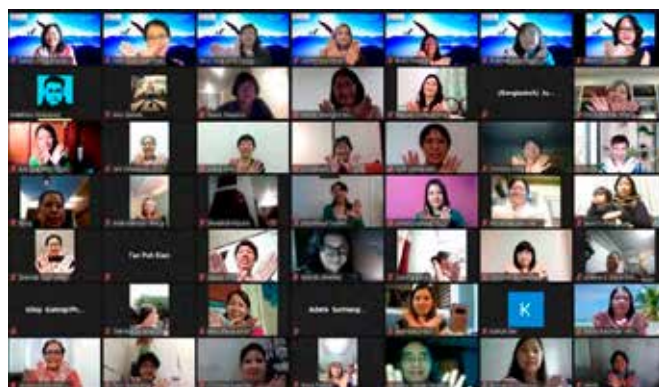
The conference was jam-packed with good speakers and topics. I will share some of the highlights. On day one, after a time of praise and devotions, Dr. Yoon Hee Kim explained the general societal trends of 2021, noting the importance of knowing these trends in order to have a relevant ministry to the younger generation. This was followed by a fascinating panel discussion among four women from different nations (Pakistan, Myanmar, Korea, and England) who shared their testimonies of how they became leaders. One of the women came from a Muslim country, and she shared that becoming a leader was a natural path for her, as she just faithfully followed and obeyed Christ. She emphasized following and obeying Christ is the most important thing, regardless of gender. Time was given for questions and answers.

Then the topic moved on to that of mental health during the pandemic. We were given a survey to check on our mental condition. As leaders, sometimes we are unaware of our own mental state. We received practical advice on how to strive for a healthy balance and stay connected with others. Day one ended with a small breakout group discussion time. For me, this breakout session time was most meaningful. We were broken up into groups of five to six people to share how the COVID-19 pandemic had affected us spiritually and mentally and how we have been coping with it. I realized it doesn't matter where we live in

the world, we all have been affected by this pandemic. Even though I had never met these women before, we shared a common connection in Christ.

Day two started off with a presentation on conflict resolution. This is a topic that is necessary in all kinds of relationships. It was helpful to see the reasons conflicts happen and different ways to resolve them. The closing devotions focused on the need to encourage and comfort others during this difficult time. Emphasis was put on the fact that the Triune God truly empathizes with us and understands our suffering. God himself is an active participant in our suffering, which should give us hope. As we trust God, we can do things we cannot in our own strength and we can reach out to others in love. We were encouraged to "soar"!

The conference ended with a time of passionate prayer. Some prayer requests were shared, and we all prayed out loud in unison in our native tongues and closed with prayers in English. You could sense the presence of God as tears were shed amongst many of us. It was particularly touching that Japan was prayed for specifically, because one of the women had shared how "alone" she felt in her ministry context in rural Japan. We were told in the end to put our hands up on our screens as if to "touch" and reach out to one another . . . a symbol of connection and unity. Though this conference was virtual, there were many "connecting" points which made this conference spiritually refreshing and encouraging. I came away from it wanting to encourage others in my context of ministry. I highly recommend that others join this conference in the future to be inspired by women leaders across Asia.



Signing of the tripartite memorandum

A memorandum on mutual collaboration among the three organizations of the Japan Evangelical Association (JEA), the Asia Theological Association Japan (ATA/J), and the Japan Lausanne Committee (JLC) was signed on June 7, 2021, for the purpose of developing stronger partnerships in the areas of mission and theological education.

During the signing ceremony, which was held during the JEA Annual Meeting at Tsumagoi Resort in Shizuoka Prefecture, Dr. Theresa Lua, General Secretary of Asia Theological Association (ATA), delivered a commemorative address on the history of the ATA and shared examples of the growing trend of partnerships and collaboration among the ATA and other organizations.

The memorandum was signed by Toshinori Ishida, Board Chairperson of the JEA, Atsuko Tateishi, Secretary of the JLC, and Masanori Kurasawa, Board Chairperson of the ATA/J. Following the signing, the three signatories expressed their expectations resulting from the memorandum.



The three art pieces shown were acquired to commemorate the signing.

Kurasawa envisioned that the memorandum will expedite seminary student and church member visits to other seminaries and churches, so that visitors, particularly younger ministers and lay people, will acquire a broader, a more global perspective in developing their own lifestyles, churches, and missional strategies. Tateishi noted that the JLC is a network of individuals relating as equals, and that it aspires for greater mobilization of youth, women, and lay people. As such, the the JLC can make use of established networks of churches and seminaries within the JEA and ATA/J to reach a wider group of Christians.

Christian Shimbun, June 20 and 27, 2021
Translated and summarized by Atsuko Tateishi

The essential function of the church is examined

The interim report from the JEA questionnaire “The influence of the COVID-19 pandemic and the current state of evangelical church planting” was presented at the online 4th Mission Research Staff Meeting on

May 10. (The response rate was 253 out of 1984 possible churches. More responses are expected.) Of the churches that had responded so far, 60% answered that their worship attendance had declined.

At the meeting, Rev. Makoto Fukui (Tamagawa Christ Church, Japan Baptist Church Association) referenced the 2016 Data Book on the Future of Evangelism in Japan (*De-ta Bukku: Nihon Senkyoh no Korekara ga Mietekuru*) which said a 3% growth rate is necessary to avoid the shrinking of Japan’s Christian population during the next 30 years. He said “due to the decrease in baptisms and birth rate because of COVID-19, the growth rate must be revised radically.” Rev. Fukui shared positive changes as a result of COVID-19 that were mentioned in the interim report:

- Newcomers or long-term absentees had the opportunity to connect with the church through online meetings.
- A renewed recognition of the importance of individual involvement versus large group meetings.

However, challenges mentioned included:

- The brevity of face-to-face meetings, which felt insufficient.
- No chance to visit sick people.
- No gathering place for children.
- No young people.
- People who can’t get online.
- Leader training cannot catch up with the need for individual meetings.

Fukui suggested changes in focus should be made as follows:

- From group or program relationships to individual relationships.
- From management or strategic concerns to spiritual concerns.
- From vertically structured, “Japanese culture” / “village” churches, to Bible-focused, “first century” type churches.
- From “uniformity” to “unity in diversity.”
- From the elderly attending a distant church to attending a church in their local neighborhood.

Rev. Masahiro Nakanishi (Japan Holiness Church Yokohama Church) followed up with a presentation inspired by Haggai 2:15-19*: Churches that Give Hope to Society: Church Reformation and the COVID-19 Pandemic. He said, “Online tools can gather more people to worship, but at the same time we need to consider the ‘online disadvantaged.’ Also, since the number of Christians without strong sense of belonging to one church is expected to increase, discipleship training will be more important.” He also pointed out that mission to our own families will be changed. “With online worship at home, couple and family relationships must be considered carefully. This

is similar to the attitude required in house churches.”

In response to the lecturers, Rev. Harutoshi Miura (Asagao Christ Church, Japan Evangelical Christ Association) introduced what he learned from an Indian church. “They admitted their weakness under COVID-19, and knelt to pray. We must admit the sovereignty of God and ask God’s compassion. Even while separated from each other, we can offer intercessory prayers in one accord.”

*Haggai 2:15-19 (New International Version)

15 “Now give careful thought to this from this day on—consider how things were before one stone was laid on another in the LORD’s temple. 16 When anyone came to a heap of twenty measures, there were only ten. When anyone went to a wine vat to draw fifty measures, there were only twenty. 17 I struck all the work of your hands with blight, mildew and hail, yet you did not return to me,” declares the LORD. 18 ‘From this day on, from this twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, give careful thought to the day when the foundation of the LORD’s temple was laid. Give careful thought: 19 Is there yet any seed left in the barn? Until now, the vine and the fig tree, the pomegranate and the olive tree have not borne fruit.’ ‘From this day on I will bless you.’”

Christian Shimbun, May 30, 2021

Translated and summarized by Tomoko Kato

Urgent global prayer for Myanmar: The church as a light

There is still much unrest in Myanmar, which has been under the control of military forces since the coup that took place on February 1, 2021. The State Counsellor continues to be detained along with other leaders, and oppression of protestors by the military is intensifying. As several countries pursue diplomatic approaches with the nation, churches worldwide are getting together as well to support the people of Myanmar.



The Asia Evangelical Alliance (AEA) held an urgent online prayer meeting for Myanmar on March 31. There were at least 300 attendees. The meeting was led by the AEA General Secretary, Bambang Budijanto, and there were three main prayer sessions: for the nation of Myanmar, its government and leadership; the people of Myanmar and those protesting in the streets for justice; and the churches of Myanmar and their leaders.

Godfrey Yogarajah, AEA Chair, opened the meeting with greetings and encouragement. “There is power in the prayers of the righteous. When we pray as one, the Lord will hear our prayers.”

Before each session, reports were given on the current political situation, the people of Myanmar, and the churches. Rev. Aye Min, Chair of the Myanmar Evangelical Christian Alliance (MECA) gave a report on the political situation: “The people are scared, darkness of falsehood engulfs the country, and there is killing, bloodshed, oppression, and tears of sorrow.” Even young children are among those being killed ruthlessly by the military.

A member of MECA and a pastor, “TT,” gave a report on churches in Myanmar: “The churches of Myanmar will make a statement against the military coup and will stand with those who are protesting on the streets. We acknowledge that the churches can be a light in this nation.”

In closing, Budijanto said, “Although the prayer meeting is over, our prayers for Myanmar will not cease. These are prayers that convey our love to generations to come, to future children.”

Christian Shimbun, May 30, 2021

Translated and summarized by Grace Koshino

(Called to be an intercessor continued from page 4)

Our Lord also introduced me to another prayer opportunity. It is called Moms in Prayer International. This wonderful group started in Canada and now is active all over the world. I was invited to this group years before, but I was not ready. At the time, I was not healed enough to pray with mothers who have healthy children, but now I am having great time with them. When we get together to pray we also watch

moms get excited to see their prayers answered and become excited to see how God uses them through their prayers. Eventually they become joyful intercessors for their family, friends, and workplaces.

It seems my prayer journey will never stop, and I love to be God’s vessel to do his work for his kingdom.

Please pray for Japan

1. Christian churches and Japanese society are still affected by the spread of the coronavirus all over Japan and throughout the world. Keep praying that Japanese churches will stand firm in strong faith and that God will protect all the countries affected by the infection.
2. Pray that the Holy Spirit will work through foreigner-friendly ministries in Japan so that Japanese churches and ethnic churches in Japan might be united in the bond of love.
3. Pray that more “Kingdom-minded” collaborations will happen among different ethnic churches in Japan and Japanese churches. There are many opportunities, including ministry to children of mixed marriages, etc.
4. Pray for young Christians and pray that God will raise up the next generation of Christ-centered, gospel-driven leaders among young Christians in Japan.

JEA related schedule

<u>DATE</u>	<u>EVENT</u>	<u>PLACE</u>
Sep. 17&24	JCE7 Preparatory Conference	Online
Oct. 11-14	Asia 2021 Plenary	Online
Oct. 11	Asia 2021 Japan meeting	Kobe & Tokyo
Oct. 14	JEA Women’s Katriba	Online
Nov. 23-24	JEA Mission Forum Fukushima	Fukushima & Online

It’s been almost 1.5 years since the outbreak of the coronavirus (COVID-19). This summer Japan had severe outbreak during the Tokyo Olympics period. Thank you for your prayer for Japan. The number of positive cases are slowly decreasing at the moment. Japanese evangelical churches has still find it difficult to gather and worship together. In this time of pandemic we keep trusting in God and would like to be a light of hope to the Japanese people as they don’t exactly know whom they trust. Please keep praying for Japanese churches and Christians.



Takahito Iwagami, Editor in Chief

<http://jeanet.org/>

Japan Update

Autumn 2021 - Number 81

English Newsletter of the
Japan Evangelical Association (JEA)

Chairman : Toshinori Ishida
General Secretary : Takahito Iwagami

Japan Update is published biannually by the JEA. Through Japan Update, the JEA seeks to communicate how God is at work in Japan and to foster prayer and collaborative work for the advancement of God’s kingdom in Japan. Views expressed by individual authors do not necessarily reflect official JEA positions. Japanese names appear in Western order (surname last).

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