

## Quake Kills, Injures Thousands in Turkey, Syria

*The Wired Word for the Week of February 12, 2023*

### In the News

At 4:17 a.m. local time on Monday, February 6, a magnitude 7.8 earthquake struck near Gaziantep (Antep) in south-central Turkey near the Syrian border, in what Turkish vice president Fuat Oktay called the "disaster of the century." Nine hours later, a separate quake, magnitude 7.5, hit in southeastern Turkey. At least 24 aftershocks were recorded in the region. Tremors were felt in Cyprus, Israel, Lebanon and Egypt.

By Thursday, the death toll in Turkey alone had risen to more than 17,000, according to Turkish authorities. The death toll in Syria surpassed 3,000, according to Syria's Health Ministry and volunteer rescuers known as the White Helmets working in the rebel-held northwest. Syria has been in the throes of civil war for the past 12 years. There are reports of at least 70,000 earthquake-related injuries in the region. Dr. Gerald Rockenschaub, a World Health Organization emergency director based in Europe, said the organization normally sees initial death tolls after an earthquake rise 8 to 10 times.

More than 16,000 search and rescue personnel have been deployed in Turkey, Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan said, not counting teams from other nations. The United Nations, WHO, nonprofits and the governments of at least 70 countries, including the U.S., many in the European Union, Israel, India, Pakistan, Japan, Ukraine and Russia, have offered humanitarian aid and assistance in search and rescue efforts. More than 8,000 people had been rescued as of Tuesday. Erdogan declared seven days of national mourning and a three-month state of emergency in the 10 most severely affected provinces. Syrian president Bashar al-Assad met with his cabinet to discuss emergency response measures.

Turkey is prone to earthquakes, due to the presence of multiple faultlines. Monday's quake followed a wide east-west path 100+ miles long in a region already traumatized by war, a refugee crisis and deep economic woes. The potential damage of an earthquake depends on its magnitude, shallowness of its epicenter, population density, and quality of building materials and construction in the area. Authorities said 6,000 buildings in Turkey and 549 in Syria were damaged or destroyed, including hospitals, schools, aid warehouses and shelters. The United States Geological Survey estimated that damage from the initial earthquake could top \$1 billion. Some authorities estimate that around 23 million people will need humanitarian assistance in the aftermath of this disaster.

Because the quake happened without warning, early in the morning, many residents were only wearing sleepwear and were barefoot at the time. Those who did escape were not prepared for the bitter cold or wet conditions. When his apartment building in Gaziantep started shaking, Serap Sari said he thought his home would be his grave. To avoid the danger of falling buildings, people sought refuge in shopping malls, stadiums, mosques, community centers and vehicles. Some built bonfires from the debris of damaged buildings to ward off hypothermia.

But finding shelter amid so much destruction has not been easy, recounted Murat Alinak, whose home in Malatya collapsed: "There is not even a single person here. We are under the snow, without a home, without anything. What shall I do, where can I go?"

"We don't have a tent, we don't have a heating stove, we don't have anything. Our children are in bad shape. We are all getting wet under the rain and our kids are out in the cold," fellow Turk Aysan Kurt said. "We did not die from hunger or the earthquake, but we will die freezing from the cold."

Search and rescue operations and humanitarian aid efforts are facing many challenges, due to bad weather and the quakes that damaged roads and airport runways, interrupting supply lines, public transportation and taxi service; gas, electricity and cell phone service; availability of and access to healthcare, sanitation, housing, food and water; and schools. "It is trauma on trauma, it is heartbreak on heartbreak," said Joe English, a spokesman for the United Nations children's agency UNICEF. "It's a long road ahead to recovery."

As a member of NATO, Turkey maintains diplomatic relations with most of the world, which means it can access international aid more easily than Syria, since the latter is under sanctions targeting the al-Assad government. The war has damaged and destroyed many communities, driving some 4 million residents into rebel-held northern Syria and across the Turkish border, where the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees runs a large operation near the epicenter of the quake. The U.N. had been assisting 2.7 million people each month via cross-border deliveries. Now the only route between Syria and Turkey approved by the United Nations for delivery of international aid into Syria is closed due to earthquake damage to feeder roads.

Not long after the earthquake caused thousands of deaths, the bodies of more than 85 refugees who had fled the Syrian civil war to take refuge in Turkey were returned to that border crossing in the hope that they can be buried in their native land. "Anywhere else in the world this would be an emergency," said Mark Kaye, of the International Rescue Committee, which has more than 1,000 local staff working in northwest Syria. "What we have in Syria is an emergency within an emergency. Abdul Salam al Mahmoud, a Syrian in the town of Atareb, said the situation felt "like the apocalypse."

Still, amid all the death and destruction, some are finding glimmers of solace and flickers of hope. Hospitalized in Idlib, Syria, Osama Abdel Hamid lost most of his neighbors when their four-story building collapsed. He and his wife and three children were hit by a falling wooden door, but it protected them from falling debris, allowing them to escape. "God gave me a new lease on life," he marveled. In the rebel-held town of Jindayris in northern Syria, seven members of a single family died when their home collapsed. Relatives digging through the rubble heard a voice and rushed to clear away debris to discover the lone surviving family member, a newborn baby girl still attached by the umbilical cord to her deceased mother. The infant was rushed to a hospital in the nearby town of Afrin, where she is recovering after treatment for lacerations and hypothermia.

## **The Big Questions**

1. To the degree you feel comfortable, identify a traumatic memory of your life or your community.
2. How did that traumatic event change your life or community? Did it make you stronger, or leave a scar that never healed?
3. Should we view natural disasters as God's judgment or punishment for some wickedness? Why or why not?

4. How would you respond to someone who claimed that a particular natural disaster was God's punishment for the sin of that region? What's a fruitful way to engage others on this topic?
5. Where, if anywhere, do you see God in the catastrophe of the earthquakes in Turkey and Syria?

## Confronting the News With Scripture and Hope

### Numbers 16:31-32

*As soon as he finished speaking all these words, the ground under them was split apart. The earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up, along with their households -- everyone who belonged to Korah and all their goods. (For context, read [Numbers 16:19-35](#).)*

### Luke 13:4-5

*[Jesus said,] "Or those eighteen who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them -- do you think that they were worse offenders than all the other people living in Jerusalem? No, I tell you, but unless you repent you will all perish just as they did." (For context, read [Luke 13:1-5](#).)*

### 1 Kings 19:11

*He said, "Go out and stand on the mountain before the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by." Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind, and after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. (For context, read [1 Kings 19:11-13](#).)*

Questions: So which is it? Is God in some earthquakes and not others, some calamities and not others? How are we to understand natural disasters?

### Luke 13:6-9

*Then [Jesus] told this parable: "A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came looking for fruit on it and found none. So he said to the man working the vineyard, 'See here! For three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree, and still I find none. Cut it down! Why should it be wasting the soil?' He replied, 'Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig around it and put manure on it. If it bears fruit next year, well and good, but if not, you can cut it down.'" (For context, read [Luke 13:1-9](#).)*

### Questions:

Who intercedes for us, that we would develop good spiritual fruit? For whom are you interceding in this way?

How should we prepare ourselves and our spiritual children for the day of the Lord? How can we know that we are ready for Christ's return?

### Matthew 24:6-8

*[Jesus said,] "And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars; see that you are not alarmed, for this must take place, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom, and*

there will be famines and earthquakes in various places: all this is but the beginning of the birth pangs.” (For context, read [Matthew 24:1-8](#).)

Questions: On what basis does Jesus instruct his disciples that they (we) should not be alarmed by things (such as false messiahs, wars, famines and earthquakes) that do alarm us? Isn't it only human and perfectly logical to be alarmed by such things? What does he mean by this instruction? Is it even possible to obey this command? How can we find peace in such devastating situations?

### **Matthew 27:51, 54**

*At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. The earth shook, and the rocks were split. ... Now when the centurion and those with him, who were keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were terrified and said, "Truly this man was God's Son!"* (For context, read [Matthew 27:50-54](#).)

### **Matthew 28:2**

*And suddenly there was a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it.* (For context, read [Matthew 28:1-10](#).)

Questions: In what way does the crucifixion of Christ shake the earth? How does the resurrection of Christ shake the earth?

Why do the events of the crucifixion and resurrection and the earthquakes that coincide with those events inspire fear in different characters in the narrative? What does that fear lead them to do? How can you use your own fear to motivate you to do God's will?

### **Acts 16:25-26**

*About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was an earthquake so violent that the foundations of the prison were shaken, and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were unfastened.* (For context, read [Acts 16:16-34](#).)

Questions: Normally, we think of earthquakes as harmful to people. But what is the function of the earthquake in this incident? What does it shake, and what purposes of God does the earthquake help accomplish? What does this tell you about how God can use nature?