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A Storm of Controversy

Mongolian emperor Kublai Khan, grandson of Ghengis Khan, saw his dreams swept away by the wind. Some say it was a wind from God himself.

By 1274, Khan controlled most of Asia, including all of China. His empire was the reigning superpower, largely because it had the *teppo*, a burning cannonball packed with gunpowder. Add to that a battle-hardened, merciless army and Kublai Khan was considered invincible.

So when he cast his covetous eyes upon Japan, victory seemed assured, especially since the Japanese had only antiquated weapons like bows and arrows, bamboo spears and wooden shields. To invade Japan, the Mongolians sent a powerful force of 900 ships and 40,000 soldiers. A measly 10,000 samurai hunkered down on the beaches but the samurai were best at one-on-one combat and would be no match for the Mongolians who fought as one single wave of destruction.

All seemed lost until, out of nowhere, a violent storm churned the seas, sinking 200 Mongolian ships and drowning 13,000 men. Devastated, the invaders turned and went home. But Kublai Khan was furious. He vowed revenge and, five years later, his armada set sail again. This time the Mongols had 900 ships and 40,000 soldiers sailing from Korea and an even bigger fleet of 3,500 ships with 100,000 men from southern China.

When the first wave arrived, the Mongols overwhelmed the Japanese warriors who fled to an inland fortress, but the other ships never landed. Miraculously, another typhoon raged in from the south, ripping apart almost all of the 3,500 ships and killing 100,000 soldiers. Soon, the other invaders turned fled, leaving the Japanese to rejoice over their deliverance by the "divine wind".

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Some historians say the Mongolian losses were so high because Khan hurried the construction of his fleet and forced his navy to use all available ships, including river boats that were no match for the sea.

Regardless, 650 years later, Japan faced yet another invasion, this time in the final days of the Second World War. In desperation, the Japanese sacrificed 5,000 young and inexperienced pilots in suicide missions against Allied vessels. Ironically, the suicide bombers were known as *kamikaze* — Japanese for "divine wind".

Did God use the storms to deliver Japan? It's impossible to say. But there are lessons we can learn here, including the need to remember that defeat is not always certain, even when the situation seems insurmountable. If we trust that God is there and loves us passionately, despite our sin, we can count on him to see us through. We can trust in *providence*, the concept that God works in circumstances to ensure that everything will be okay and work out for the best.

That doesn't always mean He'll spare us from pain and hardship; only that, when we ask, he'll give us strength, comfort and loving support to endure and prevail. *"And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love him and are called according to his purpose for them,"* writes Paul. *"And I'm convinced that nothing can separate us from the love of God." (Rom. 8:25, 38)*

So it's a trust thing. Most of us can look back and see times when we thought God was absent, only to discover later that He was there the whole time, working for the best outcome. We need to remind ourselves that if God delivered us then, He can deliver us now.

Like Kublai Khan, we often fail when we become convinced of our own invincibility, when we take moral or emotional shortcuts, and when we let pride, anger and revenge cloud our judgement. And like the Japanese *kamikaze*, we sometimes fail when we make sacrifices for the wrong cause or motive. Paul says even if we give up our very lives, without loving others, it would be for nothing (1 Cor. 13:3).

God does want us to sacrifice our lives, but for him — out of love and recognition of how Jesus on the cross delivered us from our sins. He gives us peace, pardon, and the Holy Spirit to guide us and mould us into the image of Christ. In the Bible, the Spirit is often symbolized by wind. So there is a "Divine Wind", and we need to let him sweep us into the presence, power, and protection of God.

Rick Gamble