

## MELT DOWN

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Jeremiah 2:4-13

Two weeks ago, on August 18, in the nation of Iceland, there was a funeral. About a hundred people gathered, including the Icelandic Prime Minister and foreign dignitaries, to commemorate the loss of Okjökull (*ock-you-kulk*). Okjökull is not a person. Okjökull is a glacier. And it is gone.

In 1901, Okjökull (in Icelandic, jökull means glacier; Ok is the name of this particular glacier) covered 38 km<sup>2</sup> (about 15 miles<sup>2</sup>). By 1945, the glacier had shrunk to 5 km<sup>2</sup> (1.0 mile<sup>2</sup>). By 2005, the glacier was mostly gone, melted away, a victim of Earth's rising temperatures. Five years ago, Okjökull officially was stripped of status as a glacier. This decision was made by a glaciologist at the Icelandic Meteorological Office. This scientist, named Oddur Sigurdsson, examined the glacier and determined that the glacier was no longer moving. It was no longer thick enough to stay alive. What differentiates a glacier from a skating rink is that with a glacier the snow and ice build up until the accumulations becomes so thick that its mass alone forces it to flow downhill like a slow river, moving on average about 10 inches a day. Okjökull no longer flowed. It has become "dead ice."

Iceland is known as 'the land of fire and ice' because of its volcanoes and glaciers. There are approximately 130 volcanoes on the island; and 400 glaciers cover 11% of the land. Because of climate change, scientists predict that these glaciers will disappear completely within 200 years. Scientists also predict that melting glaciers will bring dire consequences to humans around the world affecting food supplies, causing sea levels to rise, and displacing billions of people. Glaciers are the largest reserve of freshwater on the planet. Scientifically, they are valuable because they hold a frozen record of our atmosphere going back hundreds and sometimes thousands of years. The history of our global climate is located within the ancient ice.

According to a recent study<sup>1</sup>, since 1850, the European Alps have lost 54% of their ice area; glaciers in Bolivia have lost nearly half of their mass in the past 50 years; and glaciers in the Himalayas and Canada are also quickly losing ice. Up in Glacier National Park in Montana, all the glaciers are shrinking noticeably.

At the funeral for the Ok glacier, the mourners affixed a bronze plaque at the site. The plaque reads, "Ok is the first Icelandic glacier to lose its status as a glacier. In the next 200 years all our glaciers are expected to follow the same path. This monument acknowledges that we know what is happening and what needs to be done." The final

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.pnas.org/content/early/2017/08/31/1619807114>

line of the plaque addresses the people of the future with these words, “Only you know if we did.”

Our reading for today from the prophet Jeremiah is also a plaque, and it is not unlike the one marking the site of the Ok glacier. Like that plaque, Jeremiah publicly articulates the sins of his people while also addressing future generations.

Jeremiah was an influential prophet in Judah beginning in 626 BC, about thirty years before the Babylonian invasion.<sup>2</sup>

The first chapter of the book of Jeremiah primarily tells the story of Jeremiah’s answering God’s call to ministry.

In chapter 2, which we read today, Jeremiah delivers his prophesy saying, *Hear the word of the Lord, O house of Jacob, and all the families of the house of Israel.* God’s word then starts with questions to God’s people. God wants to know what has happened to the relationship between God and the people. God asks, *What wrong did your ancestors find in me that they went far from me? Why did they seek out worthless things and become worthless themselves?* God’s people had rejected God and instead they looked to worthless idols and things that aren’t God. God wants to know why the people abandoned him pursuing riches that only God can provide.

Imagine that you have an account with a bank. That bank gives you money whenever you ask. It’s not a loan, they just hand you cash. That is what they do. But you decide to abandon that bank and obtain your money another way. You decide that you will go out and rob the homeless—people who have no money. What sense does that make? It doesn’t, just as chasing idols and abandoning God does not make sense.

God points out that the people didn’t even stop to inquire about God. They just left. They didn’t ask, *Where is the Lord? Where is the Lord who led us safely out of Egypt and through the dangers of the wilderness?* God wants to know why they don’t remember what God has done for them; why they don’t remember how God delivered them into a wonderful land full of food and good things. And when the people finally did arrive in the land of promise, did they revere and respect the land as God’s land? No. They defiled that place and desecrated God’s memory. That is their sin.

And it wasn’t just the people, it was the priests and the leaders as well. They did the same thing. The rulers sin against God while the prophets urge the people to worship Baal and other gods. Everyone, it seems, had forgotten the Lord and all that God had done for them.

God accuses the people of trading in the glory they receive from God for *something that does not profit*. God is the fountain of living water, but the people choose not to drink from this fountain. Instead, they choose to store their own water in cisterns—

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<sup>2</sup> When the Babylonians defeated Judah, Jeremiah was carried off into exile and disappeared from history.

leaky cisterns. This is God's complaint and accusation—that the people, who had everything, choose to turn away in favor of something of lesser value.

Back in Iceland, the death of this glacier invites us to consider what we, the inhabitants of this holy creation, have forsaken in pursuit of lesser things. The earth is God's glory and at creation God declared it "good," and yet we have *defiled the land*. We pump carbon into the atmosphere, we're torching the rain forests, we're trashing the oceans and injecting poison into the ground water. And why do we do these things? For profit. But what kind of profit is it if we lose the only place we have to live? God gave us *a plentiful land full of fruits and good things* but we defile it. We never stopped to consider God. We sin and pursue lesser gods. We traded in God's glory for something cheap and plastic.

For people in Iceland, the ice that covers their land is part of their cultural heritage. As the glaciers recede, they are witnessing their heritage inching toward its own watery grave. In Jeremiah, God says about the promised land, *when you entered you defiled my land, and made my heritage an abomination*.

In scripture, the term living water refers to moving water—it is flowing, it is alive. Living water is going to be cleaner than the water you might find in a stagnant pond, or even worse, in a hole dug in the ground that collects rain water. Would you rather drink out of a fast-flowing mountain stream or from a brown, fetid bog? And yet, God weeps over the choice the people have made—rejecting the living water choosing bog water over God water.

The nation of Iceland, ironically, is a leader of the global environmental movement. It is the only country in the world that obtains 100% of its electricity and heat from renewable sources. Yet, sadly, the Icelandic people, with their dying glaciers, must witness directly the choices the world has made. Glaciers which once lived and moved are now dead and still. Their quiet testimony is not just a call for change but a reminder to us all—the stewards of creation—that we must alter our course. To do so we need to seek the Lord. We need to ask the question of where do we find God's glory? Is it in the pursuit of profit or in something that is God ordained?

Jeremiah addressed his prophesy to the people of God—the house of Jacob, the house of Israel. I don't think it is coincidence that the Prime Minister of Iceland, the one who spoke at the funeral for the glacier, is a woman named *Katrín Jakobsdóttir (jacobs-daughter)*. Her last name—*Jakobsdóttir*—literally means 'Jacob's daughter.' Jeremiah prophesied to the house of Jacob and today the house of Jacob speaks to us.

The plaque at the site of the Ok glacier confesses to generations to come that we were aware of what was happening, of what we were doing. We were not ignorant. Our prophets speak loudly. Only the future will know if we listened.