

“Statues and cast images of the Lord God?”

2024.07.21

by Rev. Che Choyong

<Introduction>

Good morning.

Today I would like to read the Book of Judges with you.

**Judges 17:1-6**

**1. Now a man named Micah from the hill country of Ephraim**

**2. said to his mother, “The eleven hundred shekels of silver that were taken from you and about which I heard you utter a curse—I have that silver with me; I took it.”**

**Then his mother said, “The Lord bless you, my son!”**

**3. When he returned the eleven hundred shekels of silver to his mother, she said, “I solemnly consecrate my silver to the Lord for my son to make an image overlaid with silver. I will give it back to you.”**

**4. So after he returned the silver to his mother, she took two hundred shekels of silver and gave them to a silversmith, who used them to make the idol. And it was put in Micah’s house.**

**5. Now this man Micah had a shrine, and he made an ephod and some household gods and installed one of his sons as his priest.**

**6 In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as they saw fit.**

According to the Book of Judges, after Joshua died, Israel was in turmoil with no leader to succeed him. The Book of Judges describes how each time a crisis occurs in Israel, God raises up a king to lead Israel in a faithful manner. However, the people’s situation of confusion during the time of the Judges could not be resolved, and instead of being resolved, it became worse and worse. Today’s text, chapter 17, is the story of a family living in the mountainous region of Ephraim.

**:6 “In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as they saw fit.”**

First, let us consider **”what appears good in one’s own eyes”** through Micah’s family.

Verse 2

**:2 He said to his mother, “The eleven hundred shekels[a] of silver that were taken from you and about which I heard you utter a curse—I have that silver with me; I took it.”**

**Then his mother said, “The Lord bless you, my son!”**

Micah and his family are believers in God. And the 1,100 pieces of silver he stole is quite a lot of money; referring to verse 10, one Levite’s annual income was 10 pieces of silver. So what Micah stole was equivalent to 110 times one person’s annual income. It may be natural for the mother to be angry at being stolen. However, she would curse the person with her anger. Then, when she finds out that the person who stole it is her son Micah, she immediately replaces the curse with a blessing in the name of “the Lord,” or God. From this we see that Micah’s family is wealthy and that Micah’s mother is a very quick forgiver. This does not mean that forgiveness is a bad thing.

The Ten Commandments included the commandment “Thou shalt not steal. They were Israelites, so of course they knew that. The sin of “stealing” was committed against God, yet Micah’s mother is very quick to declare his forgiveness from herself. She is declaring his restoration in God’s name.

In fact, there is something she omitted in this process. That is “repentance” toward God and the “bitterness” that comes with repentance.

Repentance involves painful emotions. Along with the admission of wrongdoing, there must be a process of looking long and hard at our sins and recognizing what we have done wrong in our hearts. Repentance of sin is admitting before God and others that what we used to think, think, and do right was actually wrong. So, in the process, our pride is hurt, and feelings of shame and apology arise. Repentance is never pleasant.

But the important thing is that because of this suffering and the process of turning to God for forgiveness, we come to know God in abundance, and because of this process, we can build a deeper trust with God.

Of course, the problem is to go too far into this process and forget God who forgives us, and also to be too self-deprecating. Taking a long hard look at our own sins, confessing and repenting before the Lord, while remembering God's love, is a necessary, yet psychologically painful process. It is never easy.

It is the same between human beings. Conversations that get a little awkward when there is trouble between us. A single "I'm sorry" that may hurt our own pride. It is in these conversations that our trust in each other deepens as we experience forgiving the other and being forgiven again.

Now, Micah's mother omitted this suffering in this repentance process of Micah. It was quickly erased. The blessings proclaimed against him are too quick. Not only in herself, but also in the restoration of her relationship with God, she has declared it easily and in God's name. It is clear that Micah's family and God are bound together by a religious relationship.

Then, in verse 3, his mother uses the words "consecrated," "Lord," and "had offered" to return the silver. These words sound cool at first glance, but what she is offering to God is a sculpture (graven image) and a cast image. As you know, this is also breaking the second of the Ten Commandments. Words like "holy," "Lord," "offering," and "blessed" are all nice words, but she actually ignores the Ten Commandments, which are the most important to keep, very easily.

<2>

Next, I would like to consider graven images and cast images. They would also be called idols.

**[Exodus 20:4]**

**"You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below."**

I would like to think here about graven images and cast images, and in these words that we have just read and in today's text, the words for graven images

and cast images, or idols, are **"for yourselves"**.

How should we define an idol? One book says that what we value more than God is an idol. I think that is exactly right. How about you? Gods that Gentiles serve? Images of frogs or eagles? Or, more to the point, yourself? People around you, or money? All sorts of things could be idols, things we value more than God. I think everyone has thought about this issue at least once. Today I would like to consider graven images and cast images that take the form of God.

Graven image is the process of sculpting a large mass of objects with sharp objects to make a statue.

Casting is a metalworking method in which raw materials are heated to a high temperature to make them liquid, then poured into a mold and cooled to solidify them into the desired shape.

Speaking of statues, there is one that was created by the Israelites. Do you remember it? After the Exodus, the people made statues of bulls while Moses received the Ten Commandments from God after arriving at Mount Sinai.

**[Exodus 32:3-5]**

**3. So all the people took off their earrings and brought them to Aaron.**

**4. He took what they handed him and made it into an idol cast in the shape of a calf, fashioning it with a tool. Then they said, "These are your gods, Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt."**

**5. When Aaron saw this, he built an altar in front of the calf and announced, "Tomorrow there will be a festival to the Lord."**

Now we see that they built a casting. Then they say the words, **"This is the one that brought you up out of the land of Egypt."** As for this image, it says gods, so we can say that it reminded them of a certain idol they saw in Egypt. But in verse 5, it says "a festival to the Lord. The New Revised Bible uses the name of God in the Old Testament with the word "Lord" in bold type. This is to distinguish it from "Lord," which is usually used.

So the calves created in this passage were created with the idea of

something that could represent the Lord God, the One who led them out of Egypt. They created the calf that best fit their hearts after comprehensively considering God's name, the image they had of God, and the deeds He had done.

They were not trying to create a completely different idol that had nothing to do with God, but rather, they created something that would best fit in their hearts as the image of God. Therefore, when the people saw the finished cast calf, they were happy and agreed with it, and danced, saying, "Indeed, this is it."

But, as you well know, God's anger against Israel flares up because of this. He will not allow this to happen. He forbids them to make statues, even if their motive is "to worship God".

An image can only represent a fragmentary feature of a thing. The image can express only a part of God. The bull, for example, may reflect the powerful image of God to some extent. However, it cannot reflect God's infinite forms of love, forgiveness, patience, etc. Even if it could, it would only be able to reflect them to some extent.

So, in a sense, the act of making an image can reflect only to a limited extent the part of the image that the person wants to emphasize, believe in, or express the most.

One can create an image of God that one "wants to believe in," "wants to see," "wants to recognize," and "looks good in one's own eyes". One can mold a part of God's nature and create a divine image of Almighty God in one's mind, without actually knowing it. You can make what you have created with your own hands conform to the ideal image that you want.

I think it was 15 years ago, when I had just become a Christian, I once said to a leader of my former church that the Old Testament might not be appropriate for the current era. I complained a little, saying, "God seems a little harsh, cold, and hard to understand". The leader said, "A god who gives you rules that you can easily understand, agree with, and keep is almost like an idol. Choyong, that is half faith." I was shocked to hear that. "It is true!" I thought to myself. I was very firm in following the rules that I could easily

serve and keep, and I would judge others based on them, but when it came to the rules that I had taught but could not seem to keep, I found myself twisting the words and looking for reasons not to obey. I was very embarrassed and felt really sorry to God.

I had unknowingly created an image of God that I wanted to believe in, that I wanted to see, that I wanted to approve of, and that looked good in my eyes.

<3>

It is also often said that the period of the Judges is a very confusing time. The reason for such a characteristic is recorded as being a generation that did not know God.

**[Judges 2:10]**

**10 After that whole generation had been gathered to their ancestors, another generation grew up who knew neither the Lord nor what he had done for Israel.**

I think "not knowing" here refers not only to knowledgeable knowing, but also to observing carefully, thinking, and being taught from that, and experiencing the Lord God again.

The generation that followed did not do this. Micah's family would have known that God exists. But they were not taught to observe, think, and try to know all aspects of God. They may have known a part of God that they liked, that they could easily accept and follow.

Let's look at verse 5.

**5 Now this man Micah had a shrine, and he made an ephod and some teraphims (household gods) and installed one of his sons as his priest.**

It says ephod and teraphim. An ephod is like a garment with 12 jewels that the high priest wears. The teraphim are mentioned in various places, such as Genesis 31, and are small idols, idols that protect the family.

They take what they like from the Lord God and make it into an image and put

it in their temple, and they also take what they like from other gods and put it in their temple. It's a palace full of things they like, and they worship filled with their own standard of favorite things. Where is the "Lord" they are talking about? Who is it?

In the New Testament era, we don't often make visible idols. There may be a difference in our actions from those of the Old Testament. However, the rebelliousness against God in our hearts and the mind to create idols are the same.

It means that it is quite possible for us living today, like Micah's mother, to not think deeply, to struggle in the Word to know God more, but to skip the process of looking at our own sin, and to ignore any aspect of God that we do not like, intellectually or psychologically.

Sculpture is a method of carving and building into a perfectly formed shape. A cast statue is made by melting silver or gold and filling it with the shape that has already been prepared. Are we not cutting down God's word to make it easier to keep without even knowing it or realizing it? Are we trying to fit God into a mold that we have created? Are we twisting God's word to make it easier for ourselves to keep it? I thought that these are issues that we need to think about carefully in this day and age.

<4>

### **6. In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as they saw fit.**

This is probably written with King David in mind.

In fact, their real king is God. So it is not that they did not have a king, but that they did not want to know their king.

Knowing the King is not an easy task. Because you have to fight against the beliefs that you have within you. So it is not always fun. In the process of trying to know God, there are times when we are troubled, times when we are angry with God, and times when we cry, but we still need to be determined to face God seriously, saying that we will follow him.

It can be said that the Book of Judges is a continuation of the Book of Joshua. It was Joshua's task to lead them to the land of Canaan. He allocates the land and tells them God's command to take possession of these cities where they will live. Then he says these words.

**[Joshua 23:10-11]**

**10. One of you routs a thousand, because the Lord your God fights for you, just as he promised.**

**11. So be very careful to love the Lord your God.**

You will surely prevail. Take heed to yourselves. Love God.

Be careful that no idol made with your own hands comes between you and God. That is what this means.

If the Exodus of Israel symbolizes salvation today, it would not be an exaggeration to say that the life after entering the Promised Land of Canaan represents the way of life in the world after becoming a Christian.

The way of life of the people in the Book of Judges is often used as the teaching material by negative example. They are not becoming more sanctified, but more and more corrupted. They live according to "what seems good in their own eyes."

Before Joshua dies, he addresses these words to all the tribes of Israel who are about to go to war with him.

**[Joshua 24:14-15]**

**14. "Now fear the Lord and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your ancestors worshiped beyond the Euphrates River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord.**

**15. But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord."**

Joshua urges the people who are about to enter the land of Canaan to make a choice. He then receives three words of decision from the people.

**18b. We too will serve the Lord, because he is our God."**



**21. But the people said to Joshua, “No! We will serve the Lord.”**

**24. And the people said to Joshua, “We will serve the Lord our God and obey him.”**

These words remind us the scene where Jesus asked Peter, “Peter, do you love me?” for three times. The way Joshua said it may sound harsher than Jesus’, but what Joshua is trying to say here is, “Love and serve God,” and “Even if you fail along the way, keep loving and serving God,” he is earnestly asking in his last sermon before his death.

That is how difficult it is to love God, to accept and obey God as He is, and to make up your mind to do so. We must continue to break the idols we have made with our own hands, and statues and casts in the form of God. Then, we will come to know, accept, and follow the true Almighty God. Only through this process can we truly “know” God’s trust, true peace, true joy, and true love.

<Conclusion>

Let’s summarize. The period of the Judges is a confusing time. It is a time when people do what “looks good in their eyes” and do not know or try to know God. However, the rebellion in their hearts is not that different from that in the hearts of those of us living in this time.

**“Therefore, take heed to yourselves, and love the Lord your God.”**

These are the words that He speaks to us who live in this world as Christians today. I believe that this is the earnest desire of each one of us who decides to be transformed into the likeness of God.

The process of sanctification is not easy and sometimes involves suffering that can tear one’s heart out. Let us not skip over the process, but rather, let us know the Lord more and more with the desire to break the image of God that we have created for ourselves, which is now in us. The Holy Spirit will guide, teach, and empower us in the process. Let us serve God together. Let us love God.

Let’s pray.