

Judges 17:3

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And when he had restored the eleven hundred shekels of silver to his mother, his mother said, I had wholly dedicated the silver unto the LORD from my hand for my son, to make a graven image and a molten image: now therefore I will restore it unto thee.

Analysis

And when he had restored the eleven hundred shekels of silver to his mother, his mother said, I had wholly dedicated the silver unto the LORD from my hand for my son, to make a graven image and a molten image. This verse presents stunning theological contradiction—"dedicating" silver to Yahweh for creating idols He explicitly forbids. The second commandment states: "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image" (Exodus 20:4). The mother's claim to "dedicate" (hiqadashti, הִקְדַּשְׁתִּי, from qadash, "to be holy") this silver to Yahweh while planning idol manufacture shows complete misunderstanding of God's holiness and hatred of idolatry.

The distinction between "graven image" (pesel, פֵּלֶל) and "molten image" (massekah, מַסְכָּה) may indicate two objects or complementary aspects of one image. Both terms appear in idolatry prohibitions throughout Scripture (Deuteronomy 27:15). The mother's dedication "for my son" reveals mixed motives—maternal affection combined with false worship. From a Reformed perspective, this illustrates the profound human capacity for self-deception. Calvin taught that the human heart is an "idol factory," constantly creating false gods. This passage underscores the regulative principle of worship: we may only worship God in ways He has authorized in Scripture.

Historical Context

The practice of making religious images was ubiquitous in the ancient Near East. Every surrounding culture used idols extensively in worship, believing they embodied or housed the deity's presence. God's prohibition of images was radically countercultural, distinguishing Israelite worship from all neighboring religions. Archaeological excavations have uncovered numerous bronze and clay figurines from the Judges period, including female fertility figures (likely Asherah) and bull images, confirming widespread Canaanite practice adoption.

The amount of silver (1,100 shekels) and the mother's claim to "dedicate" it reflect the votive offering system common in ancient religion. However, Israel's covenant relationship with Yahweh was fundamentally different. Obedience, not expensive offerings, was primary (1 Samuel 15:22). Micah's mother's "dedication" violates covenant requirements while mimicking covenant forms.

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Study Questions

1. How do we attempt to "dedicate" resources to God while simultaneously violating His revealed will?
2. What contemporary Christian practices reflect well-intentioned innovation that violates biblical worship patterns?
3. How does theological confusion about God's character lead to mixing biblical language with unbiblical practice?

Interlinear Text

אֲשִׁיבֵנִי	אֶת	אֶל-	וּמִאֵת	בְּכֹסֶף
And when he had restored	H853	the eleven hundred	H3967	shekels of silver
	H7725		H505	H3701
his mother	said	his mother	I had wholly	I had wholly
H517	H559	H517	H6942	H853
			H6942	
shekels of silver	unto the LORD	from my hand	for my son	to make
H3701	H3068	H3027	H1121	H6213
a graven image	and a molten image	וּמִסְכָּה	וְעַתָּה	לְרֹא:
H6459	H4541	H6258	H7725	H0
אֲשִׁיבֵנִי	וְעַתָּה	לְבָנִי	לְעַשׂוֹת	

Additional Cross-References

Exodus 20:4 (Parallel theme): Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth:

Exodus 20:23 (Parallel theme): Ye shall not make with me gods of silver, neither shall ye make unto you gods of gold.

Leviticus 19:4 (References Lord): Turn ye not unto idols, nor make to yourselves molten gods: I am the LORD your God.