**Foolish mistakes we make when we are spiritually high: Why do we do this? (JD10)**

So what do Len Bias, Richard Nixon & Ted Haggard—a star basketball player, the President of the US & pastor of a mega church—have in common? Each fell from the pinnacle of their success! Bias, the next NBA superstar out of the University of Maryland died of cocaine overdose a few days after being the second overall pick in the 1986 NBA draft. Mr. Nixon resigned from the Presidency, the one he had won by a landslide, because he was about to be impeached for covering up the Watergate scandal. Haggard was forced to resign from his 14,000-member church in 2006, the one he planted years earlier, following the disclosure that he had been involved with a male prostitute for three years. What happened? These men made the kind of mistakes that they were careful to avoid on their way to the top; but once having reached it, their guards were down, leading to the collapse of everything they had worked for. Today’s study continues to examine the life of Gideon but the focus will be on a situation that developed immediately after his greatest victory. How did he handle his success of being one of Israel’s illustrious judges? Did he manage to avoid the mistakes that doomed Bias, Nixon, and Haggard, or did he become yet another reminder that success in any field can be hazardous to your health, be it physical, social, or spiritual?

**Q:** Can you think of anyone else who fell from the summit of their success? (Tiger Wood, Enron).

**A. Text:** Read Judges 8:22-27. Before proceeding, certain terms need to be clarified.

1. 1,700 shackles is about 43 pounds (1 shackle=2/5 lbs) or 688 ounces. Since an ounce of gold was valued at $1,700 on March 1, this amount would be valued at about $1.2 million today.

2. An ephod was an article of clothing worn primarily by the Israelite high priest. In the case of

Gideon, it could have been an image or some solid object that became an idol (EBD p. 342).

**Q1.** Here, Israel begged Gideon to rule over them. Why were they so enamored by him? (7:19-21)

**Q2:** To appreciate why the Israelites thought so highly of Gideon, note the oppressive political situation from which they were delivered by this judge. How bad was it (6:1-6)?

3. Examining his response to this flattering request: Gideon made the right move (“I will not rule over you . . .[but] the LORD will rule over you instead”). He should’ve stopped right there; unfortunately he quickly saw an opportunity to reward himself.

**Q1:** What request did Gideon, “the rock star,” make to his adoring fans? What did he do with it?

**Q2:** In view of the amount of gold used to make this object, how do you think it appeared?

**B. Gideon’s fatal mistake: What was he thinking?**

1. While we aren’t sure why Gideon made a glistening object and then placed it in his town, the outcome was horrible: “All Israel prostituted themselves by worshiping it there” (8:27b).

**Q1:** Theologically and spiritually, what was so bad about what happened here?

**Q2:** Gideon was greatly admired by the Israelites after his great victory, but was his reputation

tarnished as a result of this incident? Did he suffer any other losses? Read 9:33-34, Prov. 22:1.

2. Had Gideon anticipated that his golden ephod would turn into an object of idolatry, he wouldn’t have done it. So what was he

thinking? Whatever it was, he was blinded from recognizing several signposts indicating that a wrong turn would lead to idolatry.

**Q:** Which signpost did he miss that easily led the Israelites to idolatry?

3. So why didn’t he see this? That is to say, why did he ask for gold earrings right after saying all the right things? (“God will lead you.”) I think the person who can clear up this matter is Gehazi who was Prophet Elisha’s servant. He said the following after

realizing that his master would not demand anything from General Naaman after healing him of leprosy: *My master was too easy on Naaman by not accepting from him what he brought. As surely as the LORD lives, I’ll run after him & get something from him.*

**Q**: In view of this,what motivated Gideon to ask for gold earrings from his adoring fans?

4. He then made a golden ephod, placing it in his hometown. Why did he do that? What was his

expectation? Consider what King Saul (1 Sam 15:12) and Absalom (2 Sam. 18:18) did

following their great accomplishment? It may be that Gideon was motivated by the same thing.

**Q1:** What did Saul and Absalom do? Is Gideon’s action similar to theirs?

**Q2** What does this say about these three men? What led them to erect their own monument?

**Q3:** What do we call this? How did this mentality cause Gideon from seeing the signpost?

5. Gideon’s mistake is something humans are quite prone to commit, especially among those who are involved in some type of

Christian ministry. We know God is the one who did it but we’re tempted to get some glory out it; that is, recognition from people

that we are pretty clever, resourceful, and talented! Then we do something so unwise like Gideon. Thus, Paul warns, “So, if you think you’re standing firm (i.e., doing pretty well) be careful that you don’t fall” (1 Cor. 10:12).

**Q:** Would you mind sharing your story?

**C. What’s the fundamental reason behind making a mistake of this nature (wanting to show off,**

**building a monument in our own honor) precisely because things are going well for us?**

1. Read 2 King 6:5-6:  *“Oh, my lord,” he cried out, “[the axhead] was borrowed!”*

**Q:** What does this mean?

2. No matter how talented & intelligent we think we are, these abilities (i.e., the axhead) are borrowed from God. But when we showoff to impress people or try too hard to be recognized by them, we are, in effect, saying that we own the axhead (i.e., talents).

**Q:** What do we call that attitude (Prov. 16:18)?

**Application:** What are some ways to declare to that my axhead is borrowed from God & that apart from Christ I cannot do anything ?

3. Paul reminds us that a prudent expression of our weaknesses is how we can experience more of Christ’s presence in our lives. He wrote in 2 Cor. 12:9: *Therefore I’ll boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me.*

4. Reminder: Don’t love success too much; learn to be faithful; share your vulnerabilities prudently; be cautious in your success