

A WHOLE NEW TEAM

WEEK 12

AN
ATHLETE
STUDY

SELLING BABE RUTH?

Did you know that before he wore the pinstripes of the Yankees, Babe Ruth played for the Red Sox? In 1919, Harry Frazee, owner of the Boston Red Sox, sold Ruth for a whopping \$125,000. That season “the Babe” had set a season record 29 home runs. That sale ignited one of the fiercest rivalries in sports between the Red Sox and Yankees—to this day!

After Babe hit the first home run in the newly-built Yankee stadium on April 18, 1923, it would forever be known as “*The House That Ruth Built*.” Today, you simply can’t envision baseball legend, Babe Ruth, without Yankee pinstripes, even though he came from “the enemy.”

Our study today focuses on the greatest team transfer in history. We’ve met the Pharisee, Saul, in a few of our previous studies. He was a pretty bad dude. He witnessed the stoning of Stephen becoming a fierce persecutor of the Church. Surprisingly, in Acts 9, all of that changed as Saul of Tarsus encountered the living Christ on the road to Damascus. As we begin today’s passage, he’s wearing the uniform of “the enemy,” but soon those days would be long forgotten and nobody would be able to imagine him out of his new uniform, with his new name—the Apostle Paul.

ACTS 9:1–9

¹ But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest ² and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. ³ Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven shone around him. ⁴ And falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?” ⁵ And he said, “Who are you, Lord?” And he said, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. ⁶ But rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do.” ⁷ The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one. ⁸ Saul rose from the ground, and although his eyes were opened, he saw nothing. So they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. ⁹ And for three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

For many years the famous broadcaster Paul Harvey did a radio show always signing off, “*And now you know... the rest of the story.*” And, if your coach is old enough, he or she can probably do an imitation of Harvey’s sign off.

We’re finishing this semester’s study half-way through the book of *Acts*, but we don’t want to leave you hanging. Scan the QR code for “...*the rest of the story.*”



DISCUSSION

In your opinion, what has been the most exciting or disappointing trade you’ve witnessed in sports?

1. Where was Saul going and why? (1-2)

2. What happened along the way? (3-6)

3. How did Saul respond? (8, also Study Notes)

4. Why does Jesus attribute Saul’s persecution of believers to himself? (4)

5. How has this study changed your understanding of and appreciation for playing on God’s Team? (What have you learned and what will you do about it?)

This is it! We’ve reached the end of our study. Thanks for hanging in there. Now, if there’s anything left on the field that you need to ask, speak up! Talk to your coach.

ICEBREAKER

OBSERVATION

INTERPRETATION

APPLICATION

A WHOLE NEW TEAM

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STUDY NOTES

FUTURE HALL OF FAMER

Saul was an impressive guy. He knew it too. Reflecting on his stats sheet, he later wrote, *“I was circumcised on the eighth day, from the people of Israel and the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews. I lived according to the law as a Pharisee. In my zeal for God I persecuted the church. According to the righteousness stipulated in the law I was blameless”* (Philippians 3:5–6).

These stats may not mean much to you, but if you were a 1st century Jew, you’d be pretty impressed. What Paul doesn’t mention here is that he also studied under one of the greatest Jewish teachers of all time, Gamaliel. What this means is he had the pedigree, the upbringing, the education, and, oh by the way, he was also a Roman citizen (which was exceptionally rare for a Jew), which means he had status. Even though he was still early in his career, there were talks of this guy as a future Hall of Famer.

GOD’S TEAM EXPECTS HIS MIRACLES

Meanwhile, as Philip and others evangelized, **Saul was still breathing threats to murder the disciples of the Lord**. He was deputized by the Sanhedrin, having **went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus** (about 150 miles north of Jerusalem) where tens of thousands of Jews lived. These letters gave Saul unrestricted permission to search out **any belonging to the Way**. (This early term for the Church, perhaps derived from Jesus’ teaching in John 14:6 as *the way, the truth and the life*.) He hunted **men or women** of the Way in order to **bring them bound to Jerusalem**. Saul’s move shows his dedication. He would not be stopped—at least not by *men*.

As Saul **went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven shone around him**. He later described the light as *“brighter than the Sun”* (Acts 26:13). Disoriented, Saul fell **to the ground**. As he did, he **heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?”** This one question demonstrates how personally connected Jesus is with his people. He didn’t ask Saul why he persecuted his disciples. He asked *“why are you persecuting me?”* When others mistreat us, Jesus takes it personally.

Saul immediately inquired, **“Who are you, Lord.”** While the original word (*kyrie*) could just mean “Sir” (as the Samaritan woman addressed Jesus in John 4:11), this supernatural context compelled Saul to realize that this Heavenly Being demanded more than a polite term of respect—he is Lord and Master.

What a surprise it must have been when the voice identified himself, **“I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting!”** Imagine learning all of the rumors had been true—the crucified Jesus lived.

Interestingly, Luke fills us in on the other guys standing there when Jesus visited Paul. They were probably surprised to see their MVP hit the ground, dazed and confused. Luke wrote, **the men who were traveling with [Saul], stood speechless**. Like Saul, they heard **the voice** [of Jesus] **but** they saw **no one**.

EXPECT GOD’S MIRACLES TO TRANSFORM GOD’S ENEMIES

Saul, obeying, rose from the ground, and although his eyes were opened, he saw nothing. Later, he described his condition as scales over his eyes (Acts 9:18). Before this encounter, he had been spiritually blinded, unable to see the world as it really was with Christ as its King. Now, however, he was physically blinded. He leaned on his companions, who **led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus**. **For three days**, Saul could not see and **he neither ate nor drank anything**.

Soon, Saul would be healed after a visit by a faithful servant of Christ. He would also, later, receive a name change; and Paul the Apostle would go down in history as the greatest evangelist our world has ever known. Along the way, he would write most of the New Testament. However, he would always be haunted by his former blindness. Not the physical blindness that led to redemption. Instead, Paul would always be haunted as a persecutor of the Church when he was blind to God’s plan through Jesus.

Hopefully, as we conclude this season of our study, your eyes have been opened to what God is doing as he continues the work he started over 2,000 years ago in the small city of Jerusalem. The Holy Spirit is still at work in the world around us. He is ever-present, working to transform the lives those who live surrendered. As we close the season, I’ll leave you with a quote from the great evangelist, D.L. Moody, who said, *“The world has yet to see what God can do through a man fully devoted to him.”* Maybe, just maybe, he’s talking about you!