

We hope you enjoy these sample pages. For ordering information, visit Liguori.org.

And God Said, "PLAY BALL!"



AMUSING AND THOUGHT-PROVOKING PARALLELS BETWEEN THE BIBLE AND BASEBALL

Gary Graf

Photographs by Jack Zehrt



Liguori/Triumph
LIGUORI, MISSOURI

Imprimi Potest:

Thomas D. Picton, C.Ss.R.
Provincial, Denver Province
The Redemptorists

Published by Liguori/Triumph
An imprint of Liguori Publications
Liguori, Missouri
www.liguori.org

Copyright 2005, 2006 by Gary Graf

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or any other—except for brief quotations in printed reviews, without the prior permission of the publisher.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Graf, Gary.

And God said, "Play ball!" : amusing and thought-provoking parallels between the Bible and baseball / Gary Graf.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 0-7648-1288-2 (hc); ISBN 0-7648-1475-3 (pbk)

1. Bible—Criticism, interpretation, etc.—Miscellanea. 2. Baseball—Religious aspects—Christianity. 3. Baseball—History—Miscellanea. I. Title.

BS538.G63 2005
220—dc22

2004061576

The editor and publisher gratefully acknowledge permission to reprint/reproduce copyrighted works granted by the publishers/sources listed on pages 179–180.

Printed in the United States of America
10 09 08 07 06 5 4 3 2 1
First paperback edition 2006

Contents

Foreword • vii

Acknowledgments • ix

Warm-Ups • 1

“I Believe in the Church of Baseball.”

Top of the 1st • 5

“Play Ball!”

Bottom of the 1st • 15

“Pair Up in Threes.”

Top of the 2nd • 23

“Runs, Hits, Errors”

Bottom of the 2nd • 31

“Babe Sold to Yankees for \$100,000”

Top of the 3rd • 37

“Where Have You Gone, Joe DiMaggio?”

Bottom of the 3rd • 41

“162 Games”

Top of the 4th • 58

“Jackie’s Going to the Major Leagues!”

Bottom of the 4th • 70

**“The Giants Win the Pennant!
The Giants Win the Pennant!”**



CONTENTS

Top of the 5th • 90

“755 Career Home Runs; 11 Career Home Runs”

Bottom of the 5th • 98

“Hit, Hit With Power, Run, Field, and Throw”

Top of the 6th • 108

“There Goes the Greatest Hitter Who Ever Lived.”

Bottom of the 6th • 116

“Worst to First”

Top of the 7th • 123

“I Really Didn’t Say Everything I Said.”

Bottom of the 7th • 130

“I Wished Harm to Allie Reynolds.”

Top of the 8th • 137

“Willie, Mickey, and the Duke”

Bottom of the 8th • 144

**“I Have Long Ago Forgiven Him,
and I Really Hope He Has Forgiven Me.”**

Top of the 9th • 153

**“Answered Prayers! After 42 Years,
the Angels Win the Series.”**

Bottom of the 9th • 166

**“With One Toss a Series Was Lost,
With Another a Series Won.”**

Post-Game Show • 173

Notes • 175

Sources and Permissions • 179



Warm-Ups

"I BELIEVE IN THE CHURCH OF BASEBALL."

Annie Savoy, Bull Durham¹



"I believe that you are the Messiah."

JOHN 11:27

AS A YOUNGSTER, I GREW UP MEMORIZING the teachings of the *Baltimore Catechism* and the lineup of the San Francisco Giants. Evenings ended with prayers, mornings began with box scores. I studied both the verses of the Bible and statistics of baseball... religiously. I collected holy cards featuring saints and prayers, and baseball cards touting stats and players. The former came with grace; the latter with bubble gum, a flat, pink rectangle of chewable sweetness. Nothing seemed more divine.

My uniform of the day alternated between the designated parochial school attire of salt-and-pepper corduroys, white short-sleeve shirt, and forest green button-up sweater and the scratchy, almost indestructible flannel pants and team jerseys of Stanaway Brothers Grocery, Les Moresco Builders, and—perhaps as a reminder that we are but a moment's notice from that great dugout in the sky—Chapel of the Highlands Mortuary. I learned of the miracle of the loaves and fishes and the Miracle of Coogan's Bluff. And I must confess that pennant races between the Giants and Dodgers inspired more prayers than most Sunday sermons.

St. Dunstan Church outside of San Francisco and Seals Stadium within the city were my respective places of worship. My childhood

church was quite modest in comparison to St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York. But to the fifty students in my second grade class, its peaked roof seem to rise to the heavens themselves. The sturdy wood rafters that held the roof above us lent an air of solidity and strength. Endless rows of honey-stained pews greeted us on entry, and a larger-than-life Jesus nailed to the cross above the altar beseeched us to be good boys and girls.

Priests in colorful and elaborate vestments celebrated the Mass in Latin. Certain gestures occasioned bells to be rung by altar boys. Beeswax candles burned bright, giving off an ethereal glow. The sweet aroma of incense filled the air. A choir sung celestial hymns accompanied by music from an unseen organ. Each element of the Mass added more to the mystique of my religion. I remember one Mass in particular. There, hanging over the altar, the forlorn figure of Jesus, his blood-caked hands and feet nailed to the cross, a gaping wound in his side. His pleading eyes held me in their gaze. I could not turn away. Minutes—it seemed like hours—passed before I was released. Such could be the pull of my faith.

San Francisco's Seals Stadium was a pale comparison to its New York cousin, Yankee Stadium, or even the old Polo Grounds. Seals was a minor league park literally and figuratively, a single level, cigar-box venue, holding only 22,900 fans, less than half of the capacity of today's modern ball yards. But to a nine-year-old boy celebrating his birthday with his parents, it had all the grandeur of a cathedral. My first walk through the tunnel leading to my seat between first base and the right field foul pole took my breath away. It was a wondrous sight of lush green, illuminated by banks of bright lights. The infield dirt looked as if it were groomed with a comb, the bases were sparkling soft pillows of white, the four corners of a perfect diamond. I had never seen so many rows of seats before.

Vendors wrestled with containers, holding every kind of delectable treat—but especially the hot dog with brown, spicy mustard. (They never tasted like this at home.) Peanut and popcorn smells

filled the air. The cream-colored uniforms of the home team Giants gleamed in angelic hues, while the road grays of the Phillies gave off a hint of dirt and devilry.

On the field, third-base coaches offered a mime of flashing hand and arm motions, sending silent, secret signals that only batters and baserunners could decipher. Thousands roared in appreciation or derision of close calls by the umpires. Organ music rallied the clapping fans at crucial moments during the game. It was an exhilarating experience, a thrill of my short lifetime. It left me wanting more.

So while the gospels of Matthew and Mark were giving nourishment to my soul, the feats of Mays and McCovey were taking hold of my heart. It was not easy to know which held more meaning for me as a youth: my first Communion or my first major league baseball game. Both were spiritual experiences.

Communion made me eligible to receive the major league sacrament of the Catholic Church, ingesting the bread transformed into the body of Christ just as Jesus ordained during the Last Supper on the night before his death. Of course as a second-grader at the time, all this was beyond me. I likened the host, an unleavened thin disc of bread, to a white Necco Wafer, a popular candy of the day. The host, as you might expect, was not nearly as tasty.

At that first game at Seals Stadium, I was overjoyed to be in the presence of my heroes whose exploits I had read about, dreamed of, listened to, committed to memory. Yet, on that September night in 1959, I was unaware of the ballet performed around second base with the turning of a double play, nor the deception practiced by a pitcher throwing a changeup. I had no clue that three future Hall of Famers performed for me that evening: pitcher Robin Roberts, the hard-throwing Philadelphia Phillie right-hander; center fielder Willie Mays, said by many to be one of the greatest ever to play the game; and Willie McCovey, a tall, lanky rookie first baseman who would become one of the most feared sluggers in baseball.

Communion and baseball, I was just happy to be there. I had no

deep understanding of either. Since then I have grown to appreciate their intricacies, subtleties, profundities, and, even their commonalities. In the intervening years, I have struggled with my faith and at times the direction of baseball. Yet, both continue to have a hold on me, tugging at something deep inside. I keep returning. Each has taught me lessons about love, loss, and life. Each has its own rewards, its version of universal truth. Each reveals a wondrous glimpse into what it is to be human. I'm no theologian, and I was never very good with a curve ball, but I marvel at the symbiosis, the intimate connection between that which is heaven sent...and the game which is heaven on earth.

This book is a joint expression of two of my greatest loves: baseball and the Bible. It is, however, in no way meant to be an exegesis (interpretation) of the Bible. I am not a biblical scholar and don't pretend to be one here. Some of my observations on the Bible and its connections to baseball are just that...observations. They are at times, I hope, thought-provoking, challenging, curious, and—sometimes—amusing. Perhaps through this book readers will learn to love the Good Book and great game as I do. And realize that there is a great deal to be learned about life through both.

It's said that God is present everywhere. For me this is nowhere more true than on a baseball field. In fact, I expect that baseball may just well be the secular version of God's grace to us all. So step up to the plate and make the sign of the cross. There's a lot we can learn from angels, both guardian and those from Anaheim.

Top of the 1st **"PLAY BALL!"**

Home plate umpire at the start of every baseball game.



And God saw that it was good.

GENESIS 1:10

SINCE THE BEGINNING OF TIME, people have had a preoccupation with, well, the beginning of time. Every culture has its own creation myth, the biblical stories of Genesis included. Scientists try to pinpoint, within a few billion years, the big bang that started it all. To get a sense of our own history, we ask our parents, "Mommy, how did you and Daddy meet?"

As human beings we struggle with fundamental questions: Who are we? Why are we here? How do you throw a curve ball?

We search for our place in the universe. If we can't say with any certainty where we are ultimately headed, then we do our best to determine from whence we came. Creation tales provide us with a starting point and, if we're lucky, our marching orders. They become the touchstones that connect us to our planet, to one another.

The same can be said about faith and baseball.

Because of our desire for origins, stories with wonderful beginnings tend to captivate and hold us. Two of the best can be found in the creation of the game of baseball, not to mention of life itself. Take a look at the respective Bibles of American baseball and Christian faith, *Baseball: An Illustrated History* by Geoffrey C. Ward and documentary filmmaker Ken Burns, and the real thing, *The Holy Bible*, in this case the *New Revised Standard Version*.

Ask any baseball player or fan worth his weight in Bobble Head

Dolls about the origins of the game, and you are likely to hear the name of the game's inventor, Abner Doubleday. Messrs. Ward and Burns recount that

One summer afternoon in 1839, at Cooperstown, on the shore of Otsego Lake in upstate New York, the boys of the Otsego Academy were playing a game of town ball against Green's Select School. The rules of town ball were so loose that every hit was fair, and the boys sometimes ran head-long into one another. That day, a resourceful young Otsego player named Abner Doubleday sat down and, on the spot, drew up the rules for a brand-new game, and called it baseball. Doubleday would eventually become a hero at the Battle of Gettysburg, and his game would become the national pastime.¹

Other memorable starts come to mind: William Boeing visits an air show and declares, "I think we can build a better airplane." After losing the rights to his cartoon character Oswald the Rabbit, Walt Disney creates Mickey Mouse on a train ride from New York to Hollywood. Even the sport of basketball can trace its origins to a bit of Americana. James Naismith had his young charges heave a round ball into peach baskets at a Springfield, Massachusetts, YMCA. In the modern era, "The Steves," Sculley and Jobs, invent Apple Computer in their garage. Bill Gates drops out of Harvard to form Microsoft with Paul Allen.

So it should come as no surprise that baseball sprang from the mind of young Doubleday in bucolic upstate New York. That's why the baseball Hall of Fame resides in Cooperstown after all. That's why the ballpark there is called Doubleday Field.

You don't have to look too far to see Abner's fingerprints on his grand plan either—a hit in which a batter safely reaches second base is called a "double." It's not too difficult to envision how playing

two of Doubleday's games in a single sunlit afternoon came to be called a "double header."

However, Ward and Burns add, "...or so the old story had it."²

Apparently, while he was a distinguished Civil War hero, firing one of the first federal guns from Fort Sumter in 1861, Abner Doubleday was at West Point, not Cooperstown, during that fine summer in question. As Ward and Burns put it, "He never claimed to have had anything to do with baseball, and may never have even seen a game."³

Baseball shades of Sidd Finch, the fictional New York Mets pitching phenom that *Sports Illustrated*, via the gifted pen of George Plimpton, foisted on its readers one April Fools' Day in 1985.

As our nation's early spin doctors presented our first president, George Washington, as larger than life, so too has baseball undergone a cultural makeover. With George, we were taught that he chopped down the cherry tree, never told a lie, and hurled a silver dollar across the Potomac River. Our only question was whether he used a two- or four-seam fastball grip on the coin. That Washington, as well as Jefferson and many of our founding fathers, owned slaves didn't seem to make the media guide of those times.

Through no fault of his own, Abner Doubleday became Abner doublecross. In *Baseball: More Than 150 Years*, authors David Nemec and Saul Wizen elaborate:

At that time public debate raged over whether baseball was purely an American creation, the view argued by Albert Spalding [he of the sporting goods company of the same name], or whether it was a descendant of British games such as rounders....As a public relations maneuver, Spalding arranged for a rigged blue-ribbon commission [The Mills Commission of 1907] to name Doubleday as the father of baseball....In the words of Harold Peterson, "Abner Doubleday didn't invent baseball; baseball invented Abner Doubleday."⁴

In terms of veracity, it appears baseball stumbled right out of the batter's box. But trickery is part of the game of life. For instance, the first book of the Bible, Genesis, reveals that Jacob obtained his father's blessing under duplicitous circumstances. Tradition held that older brother, Esau, was in line for the family birthright, which in this case just happened to be the ancestral covenant that Abraham, Jacob's grandfather, made with God. Could baseball's first fans have been similarly fooled?

If the Doubleday story was scored an error, how then did baseball come about? Let's see what happens in the game's next at bat.

It turns out that our national pastime was actually inspired by many nations. After all, our country has no underlying nationality, but instead came to be by virtue of a mix of peoples seeking religious freedom. These first settlers brought with them their books of worship and their own favorite games of play. Two of the most prominent from which baseball derives many similarities come from England—cricket and rounders. These games inspired colonial counterparts with such names as barn ball, stickball, round ball, base, and even base ball (two words).

Burns and Ward describe an early game of baseball: a square infield, no fixed positions, up to fifty players scattered about. A feeder tossed the ball to the striker who was allowed to demand that the ball arrive either high or low, and then wait and wait if necessary, until he got his wish. One out retired the side, and a runner was out if the ball was caught on the fly or he was "soaked," or hit, with the ball while running the bases.⁵ Fortunately, the game underwent a refinement or two.

What has become the game we play today had its true beginnings in New York City during the "Summer of '42"—1842, that is.

Sometime during the spring or summer of 1842, a group of young gentlemen began getting together in Manhattan each weekend to play one or another version of the game, depend-

ing upon how many showed up at game time. They played first on a vacant lot at the corner of Madison Avenue and Twenty-Seventh Street, then in a slightly more spacious clearing at the foot of Murray Hill.⁶

Obviously, refinements would have to be made. After all, if they put first base at Madison and Twenty-Seventh and put second base at Murray Hill, that's an awful long way to leg out a double! But it's like batting against the Chicago Cubs' pitcher Greg Maddux. You know a change is going to come, you just don't know when.

In this case that change came three years later on September 23, 1845. On that date, twenty-eight of the fine fellows in the group mentioned above, apparently at the urging of a twenty-five-year-old shipping clerk named Alexander Joy Cartwright, Jr., created the game's first baseball team—the New York Knickerbocker Base Ball Club.

The Knickerbockers decreed that the infield be diamond-shaped, rather than square. First and third bases were set at forty-two paces apart. The balk was identified and outlawed. Foul lines were established. Pitchers were to throw the ball underhanded, keeping the elbow and wrist straight. The batter got three missed swings before he was called out. Most important, runners were to be tagged or thrown out, not thrown *at*.⁷

If all this is true, how could we be under the spell of the Doubleday myth for so long? Actually, it's not too hard to imagine. One explanation might be that we were desperate for our own identity, our own heroes, our own stories and history. So early editions of the America PR machine gave us folklore, far and wide. Rather than focus on George's wooden teeth, we have Washington and his silver dollar, and his never-tell-a-lie persona. To explain the foul smell of buckskins in our nation's capitol, we hear of frontier-taming, bear-wrasslin' Davy

Crockett. In our youthful exuberance, and perhaps to impress more established cultures, our stories took on more mythical proportions. Thus, we had John (Johnny Appleseed) Chapman walking the land planting apple trees, and war hero, baseball-inventing Abner Doubleday himself.

Who really knows how legends develop? Our ancestors, in search of religious freedom, brought with them one of the greatest sources of storytelling ever compiled: the Bible. Steeped in the Good Book's penchant for storytelling and maybe a looser interpretation of historical accuracy, baseball lore may have been embellished along the lines of the Holy Bible.

In the Bible, life is so wondrous a concept that the world was created twice. Or at least it was recorded as such in the first chapter of Genesis.

SCENE 1, TAKE 1

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day (Genesis 1:1-5).

In similar fashion, for the next five days God kept adding to his creation. On the second day came the oceans and sky. The third day brought about dry land and with it grass, herbs, and fruit trees. On the fourth day, God created the sun and the moon. By the end of the fifth day, our Creator had given the command: "Be fruitful and multiply" to the creatures of the sea, the birds of the air and all the animals that roamed the land. On the sixth day, God said,