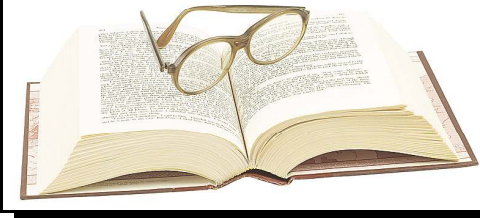


MESSAGES FROM WAYNE'S STUDY



“ONCE UPON A TIME . . .”

#0011

Anyone who has read nursery stories to young children remembers that they, traditionally, start out with “Once upon a time . . .” which leads one to believe that what follows is just a story to be read for entertainment.

But what about the phrase “It came to pass . . . ?” Is this not the same sort of thing? Before you answer that, let me tell you that this phrase occurs 176 times in the NKJV, starting with

“And in the process of time it came to pass that Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to the LORD.” Genesis 4:3 and ending with, **“And it came to pass after three days that Paul called the leaders of the Jews together. So when they had come together . . .”** Acts 28:17.

Then there is **“Then it happened that . . .”** Starting with **“Then it happened, as he drew back his hand, that his brother came out unexpectedly; . . .”** Genesis 38:29 and ending with **“Then it happened, as He was coming near Jericho, . . .”** Luke 18:35, for a total of 14 times.

I could cite other such phrases all through the Bible. Do these indicate something that “happened by chance,” they were “coincidences?” **“Then the young man who told him said, “As I happened by chance to be on Mount Gilboa, there was Saul, leaning on his spear; and indeed the chariots and horsemen followed hard after him.”** 2 Samuel 1:6

I really wish Bible translators would come up with better idioms for these expressions in the Bible. Nothing in the life of a Christian “just happens to come to pass by chance” (to combine all three phrases). There is one passage that “by chance” is (apparently) a correct translation. **“And by chance a priest was going down on that road, and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side.** Luke 10:31 (NASB). The word used here is *συνκυρία* (*sunkuria*) which, in of itself does not necessarily mean “by chance,” but, when proceeded by *κατά* (*kata*) does. So, then, is it true that at least some things happen by chance?

First, the above verse is the only verse in the New Testament using that phrase. Secondly, you must study the context! **“Jesus replied and said, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among robbers, and they stripped him and beat him, and went away leaving him half dead.”** Luke 10:30 (NASB). Jesus is not relating a piece of history. In a sense, you might say it is a “fairy tale” (i.e., an allegory¹) It was not an event that actually happened! For this reason, it is not improper to use “by chance” since Jesus is simply using it to illustrate a point.

Just to be complete, there is the “casting of lots.” **And they drew lots for them, and the lot fell to Matthias; and he was added to the eleven apostles.** Acts 1:26 (NASB) Was Matthias the “lucky one” because the lot fell to him? Again, read the context! **And they prayed and said, “You, Lord, who know the hearts of all men, show which one of these two You have chosen** Acts 1:24. (NASB) The Lord controlled the lot, as always. Casting of lots is a true Biblical concept (in the proper circumstances).

To conclude, is it wrong for you to say, “I am indeed fortunate to be a Christian!” You are, indeed, fortunate, but not by chance, God gave you this “fortunate” status. It is **“not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”** Ephesians 2:9-10 (NKJV)

¹allegory, a story, poem, or picture which can be interpreted to reveal a hidden meaning.(Oxford Dictionary)

