
“AND IT CAME TO PASS”

“and it came to pass that there was a voice heard” (3 Nephi 9:1)

“And it came to pass” occurs frequently in the Old Testament.¹ The actual Hebrew Bible has some 1,200 occurrences of the phrase, so the King James translators probably found it to be redundant and cumbersome. As a result, they often translated it as “and it became,” “and it was,” or “and.” On a number of occasions they simply ignored the expression altogether. By the time they finished their work on the King James Version, some 727 instances of the phrase remained in the text.

Given the Semitic background of the Book of Mormon, it is not surprising that “and it came to pass” is also a characteristic feature of that book, where it occurs more than a thousand times. It is so common that humorist Mark Twain once quipped that if Joseph Smith had left “and it came to pass” out of the Book of Mormon, the book would have been only a pamphlet.² Despite Twain’s hyperbole, the expression “and it came to pass” performs an important role in the Book of Mormon, helping to link clauses and events together.

Similar to the KJV translation, the frequency of “and it came to pass” in the Book of Mormon was reduced from what it was in the original

translation, which had 1,494. Book of Mormon scholar Royal Skousen observes, “Interestingly, the original text of the Book of Mormon is closer to the Hebrew text of the Old Testament in having extra occurrences of the phrase ‘it came to pass,’ while the editing of the 1837 Book of Mormon text more closely matches the King James translation by leaving unexpressed or obscured various instances of ‘it came to pass.’”³

Also similar to Old Testament usage, “and it came to pass” appears most often in Book of Mormon historical accounts, where it serves as a narrative connector and time marker. In the Old Testament and the Book of Mormon the phrase is less frequently found in psalms, lamentations, proverbs, blessings, curses, prayers, speeches, and dialogues where the first-person pronoun is used. For example, in the Book of Mormon the expression is missing from the psalm of Nephi (2 Nephi 4:16–35); the speeches of King Benjamin, Abinadi, Alma, Jesus Christ, and others; and many of the book’s epistles.

Notes

1. This expression is referred to in various Hebrew grammars; see, for example, Blau, *Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, 107; and Lambdin, *Introduction to Biblical Hebrew*, 123. See also Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible*, 413. For a brief discussion, see Parry, “Why Is the Phrase ‘And It Came to Pass’ So Prevalent?”
2. Twain, *Roughing It*, 111.
3. Skousen, *History of the Text of the Book of Mormon: Part 1*, 166.