

COINCIDENTALLY

Have you seen something out of the ordinary come about where the chances of those factual circumstances all converging at the same time appeared about as likely as a pig sprouting wings and flying to Mars? I'll give you an example of something that happened to Tim Tebow—the former N.F.L. quarterback who is a noted devout Christian. On January 8, 2012, Tebow was playing for the Denver Broncos in a playoff game against the Pittsburgh Steelers. Exactly 3 years before this, Tebow had played in the College National Championship game. In that college game, he had made a special tribute to the Lord by writing something on the “eye-black” that he wore. He had used a white marker to boldly write on the eye-black in letters and numbers that the whole world could plainly see: “JOHN 3:16.”¹ And in this pro game against the Steelers, Tebow decided to once again write “JOHN 3:16” on this eye-black. Now, nobody can really explain this, but the “3:16”, or the numbers 3-1-6, repeatedly emerged in several statistics that came out of the game. For instance:

- Tebow ended up passing for exactly 316 yards.
- And what was his average yards-per-pass completion? You got it!—31.6 (note again, 3-1-6).
- In the first 3 quarters of the game, how many passes did he attempt?—16, of course.
- What was his average yards rushing per each run?—3.16 yards per carry.
- What was the Broncos' time of possession for the game?—31 minutes and 6 seconds.
- And last, but not least, what was the CBS television ratings for the viewers watching the game?—the same as his average pass completion: 31.6.

Six different statistical categories involving Tebow and his team and they all reflected 3-1-6, the very number displayed so prominently under his eyes

bringing glory to God with reference to one of the most beloved verses in the Bible—*John 3:16!*

When his public relations guy told him this shortly after the game, Tebow recalls: *“I was just standing there in the hallway about to do this press conference just thinking that that night was about a football game. It really wasn't . . . We serve such a big God. The God that we serve is a God of miracles. I just have to be willing to step out and say, ‘Here you go, God, I’m going to give you my fish and my loaves of bread’ and watch what He does with it.”*²

Now, I thought things like that always happen to other people, but on our trip to visit our daughter, Darcy, in Utah, we had something almost as amazing happen to us. We wanted to go to a Baptist church on the Sunday while we were there, so we Googled in *“Baptist churches in Layton, Utah,”* and were surprised to find that four churches were very close by. So, we randomly chose one of them and headed there on Sunday morning and attended worship service. The congregation must have had about 100 plus people present and the sermon was very good. When the service ended, the man sitting next to me asked if we were visiting. I said, “Yes,” and explained that we had come from Virginia to visit our daughter. The man reply, *“Oh yeah! I’m from Virginia too.”* And I thought to myself, *“Now that’s a coincidence!”* So, I asked him, *“What part of Virginia are you from?”* And he said, *“Oh, it’s just a little rural county, between Charlottesville and Richmond, called Goochland.”* You could have knocked me over with a feather. So, I asked him his name, and he told me that he was Tom Mustian. I know several Mustian’s very well who live in Goochland. As it turns

out, his brother, Tim, painted our back porch last summer, and his parents and three of his brothers had been members of Perkins Baptist Church where I grew up. What are the chances of all of that?—one in a billion? How do you explain it? Do we call it a coincidence and leave it at that?

The world would. The world would look on and say exactly that. *“Oh! That was just a coincidence,”* they’d claim. We, as Christians, typically respond, *“There is no such thing as a coincidence.”* But, we might want to think about something Jesus said, because for reasons that I will explain later, we may need to re-phrase our response. Why?—because the Bible clearly teaches that these things are *“coincidences”*—they are just not the kind of *“coincidences”* that the people of this world are accustomed to. To help us understand why this is the case, let me give you just a few examples of Biblical *“coincidences”* that are found in both the Old and New Testaments.

You may remember the story in Genesis 24 where Abraham had sent his servant back to northern Mesopotamia, which is now modern-day Iraq, to find a wife for his son, Isaac. When the servant got there he offered a prayer asking God to help him identify the right woman to be Isaac’s wife. This is what he prayed: ¹² “LORD, God of my master Abraham, give me success today and keep your promise to my master. ¹³ Here I am at the well where the young women of the city will be coming to get water. [Bear in mind that the servant knew that all kinds of Sally’s and Jane’s and Lucy’s would be coming to that well—so there’d be a lot of women to pick from. And then his prayer goes on:] ¹⁴ I will say to one of them, ‘Please, lower your jar and let me have a drink.’ If she says, ‘Drink, and

I will also bring water for your camels,' may she be the one that you have chosen for your servant Isaac. If this happens, I will know that you have kept your promise to my master. Genesis 24:12-14 (TLB) Now, what would be the chances of one of those women answering in that way? Think about it—according to **Genesis 24:10**³, this servant had 10 camels with him, and your typical thirsty camel on a hot day can drink about 53 gallons of water in only three minutes.⁴ That's 530 gallons of water that the woman would have had to tote from the well and pour into the trough to satisfy these thirsty camels. Now, a lot of Sally's, Jane's and Lucy's would have been coming to the well that day, but the reality was that their likely response to this servant would have been for them to tell him to take a hike. They would have all told him to get his own water and to leave them alone. There was a billion to one chance that any of them would respond according to the servant's prayerful request. And yet, it wasn't Sally, Jane or Lucy that happened to be at the well when the servant showed up. It just happened to be the beautiful Rebecca, and this is what she said:¹⁸ **"Drink, sir," and [she] quickly lowered her jar from her shoulder and held it while he drank.**¹⁹ **When he had finished, she said, "I will also bring water for your camels and let them have all they want."**²⁰ **She quickly emptied her jar into the animals' drinking trough and ran to the well to get more water, until she had watered all his camels.** Genesis 24:18-20 (TEV) And, the servant knew he'd found the right woman, right off the bat! That, I am telling you, was a "**coincidence.**" But, before you throw a hymn book at me in objection to this conclusion, let me finish.

And, without elaborating on the entire stories, let me ask you to think

about a few other Old Testament *“coincidences.”* When Joseph’s brothers threw Joseph into that well, I ask you: What were the chances that a caravan of merchants would just happen to pass by on their way to Egypt in the nick of time before his brothers might have killed Joseph?⁵ And, what were the chances that these traders would buy Joseph and then just happen to sell him to the one man in all of Egypt who’d have just the right connections with the Pharaoh—who through a series of even more unlikely events, would position Joseph to become the most powerful administrator in one of the most power countries in the world, at a time. And what are the chances that all of this would just happen to coincide with the coming of an eventual famine?—all of which resulted in the Israelites migrating to Egypt and being saved from complete annihilation by starvation? What are the chances of all those unlikely events transpiring? What is the answer? Well, like I said before: It was all *“coincidence!”*

When the Prophet Jonah, disobeyed and shirked God’s command to preach salvation to the Ninevites, by *“coincidence”* a whale just happened to come by and swallowed him up—saved him from drowning.⁶

In the New Testament, by *“coincidence,”* Caesar declared a census⁷ just in time for Joseph to go to Bethlehem, just in time for Mary to give birth to a baby, whose birth happened to have been predicted to take place in that unlikely little village centuries before!⁸ And, it was clearly a *“coincidence”* that a star happened to be in the sky that led three wise men to the stable they were in.⁹

And, what about Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch? The Ethiopian eunuch was a member of the royal court of Queen Candace. He had traveled all the way

to Jerusalem in the hopes of learning more about, and worshipping, the only true God. Yet, due to his status as a eunuch, Jewish regulations forbid his entry into the temple. And so, he was denied access there to worship. Nevertheless, through his own persistence, he procured a scroll that just happened to contain a portion of the Book of Isaiah. And, with it in hand, he got into his chariot and started making his way back to Ethiopia. And, then, by chance, a Christian, by the name of Philip was traveling this same lonely desert road, and he approached the chariot and asked the Eunuch if he understood what he was reading. The passage that he was reading in the Book of Isaiah, just by chance, happened to be referring to Jesus Christ. And through these series of unlikely events, this Ethiopian eunuch came to know Jesus as his Savior, and was baptized by Philip right there in the desert where a pool of water just happened to be nearby.¹⁰ And so, we have another set of “*coincidences!*”

But, from a biblical perspective, what is a “*coincidence*”? Well, from a biblical perspective, a “*coincidence*” is not something that we, as Christians, deny. Rather, it is something that we embrace as a core part of our faith in God. Did you know that the Greek word translated as “*coincidence*” appears only one time in the New Testament? There, it was used by Jesus in the Parable of the Good Samaritan. In Luke 10:31, Jesus said: “Now by *coincidence* a certain priest was going down along that road, and when he saw him [the injured man], he passed by on the other side.”^(AMP) The Greek word *coincidence* is translated from the Greek root word συγκυρία (synkyria), pronounced “soong Korea”—which is actually a combination of the word “*sun*,” meaning “*together with*,” and the

word *kurious* which means “*supreme in authority.*” So the use of the word *coincidence* by Jesus has a very special meaning—the definition would be something like: “*That which happens together with God’s supreme pre-arrangement of circumstances.*”¹¹ In other words, those things that just seem to happen in life by the most unlikely of chances are very often actually the Hand of God at work laying the groundwork in advance to further His plans.

So, rather than saying, “*There are no such things as coincidences,*” we, as Christians might want to rephrase that to say: “*There are no coincidences apart from the Hand of God.*” After all, that is what the Bible teaches again and again. For instance, the Book of Proverbs bears this out when it says: “*The lot [or dice] is cast into the lap, but the decision is wholly of the Lord, even the events that seem accidental are really ordered by Him.*” Proverbs 16:33 (AMP) God declares in the Book of Isaiah: ⁹ “*Remember the things I have done in the past. For I alone am God! I am God, and there is none like me.*” ¹⁰ “*Only I can tell you the future before it even happens. Everything I plan will come to pass, for I do whatever I wish.*”¹¹ . . . “*I have said what I would do, and I will do it.*” Isaiah 46:9-11 (NLT2)

And what does this tell us about our lives?—about God’s relationship with us? God, through the Prophet Jeremiah, answers this when he says: “*For I know the plans I have for you,*” declares the LORD, “*plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.*” Jeremiah 29:11 (NIV) Those things that we call “*coincidences*” are reminders that God gives to us to assure us that He is, indeed, actively involved, even in the smallest details of our lives. That He, as Sovereign Lord of All Things, arranges the circumstances of those who call upon

His Name. It may have been hard for Jonah to appreciate that fact while he struggled to breath in the belly of that whale, but it was God’s way of rescuing that wayward prophet.

Yes, it is sometimes difficult to see the pattern of God’s plan for our lives. Sometimes the things that we go through just don’t make sense—at least, not from our limited perspective. And yet, God’s plan is always certain, always sure, always for the benefit of those who trust in Him—even though it is hard for us to see. There is a story of an old pastor who would make the rounds at hospitals to comfort the sick. And, he’d often show them a bookmark that he carried in his Bible. But, when he first showed it to them, he’d turn the bookmark onto its back side. All they could see was a series of treads in different colors overlapping themselves in what appeared to be a random way. And so, he’d ask them what they could see in this bookmark, and they would say, *“Nothing—it just looks like a jumble of over-crossing treads.”* And then, he’d turn the bookmark over, and they could read quite clearly. The carefully embroidered stitching read: *“God loves you.”* God is the *Grand Weaver* who knows the design for your life—the plan that He wants you to follow. But, God’s ways are so much higher than our ways. His plans are so much greater than our own.¹² And we, so often, are only able to see the backside of the bookmark that makes up our lives. So, look out for those *“coincidences”* in your life. When unusual things happen—even when they are very difficult things to live through—know that God is at work and in control, even though you can’t see how at the time. Let me give you one last example.

Ira Sankey had been a soldier in the Union army during the Civil War. And one time, when he was on sentry duty at the front lines, he just had the urge to sing out a hymn. He didn't understand what had overcome him at the time, but sing out he did. And, unlike me, he had a wonderful voice. Now, his superiors were not too happy about a sentry—who was supposed to keep himself concealed—singing out and giving away his position to the enemy. So, they strongly advised him not to do that anymore. Many years after the war, Mr. Sankey was traveling on a steamer down the Delaware River. Some of the passengers on board had seen his picture in the newspaper that had been taken when he was accompanying the great evangelist, D. L. Moody. Mr. Sankey would often sing hymns at Mr. Moody's revivals. So, the passengers asked him to sing a hymn, and Mr. Sankey obliged them by singing "*Savior, Like a Shepherd Lead Us.*" *Coincidentally*, one of the verses of that hymn reads: "*We are thine, do thou befriend us; be the guardian of our way.*" And, when he finished singing, a man in the crowd approached him with a tear in his eye. And the man, with a soft southern drawl, politely asked, "*Were you in the army, Mr. Sankey?*" To which, he responded: "*Yes, I joined up in 1860.*" And, then the man asked: "*Did you do guard duty at night in Maryland, in September of 1862?*" "*Yes, I did,*" Sankey replied. "*I know,*" the man said. "*I was in the Confederate Army. I saw you one night at Sharpsburg. I had you in my gun sight as you stood in the light of the full moon. Then just as I was about to pull the trigger, you began to sing. It was the same hymn you sang tonight. And when I heard it, I just couldn't shoot you. I put my rifle down.*"¹³

What are the chance that Mr. Sankey would have that urge to sing out a hymn in praise of God on that moon lit night outside of Sharpsburg, Maryland, after the Battle of Antietam? What are the chances that his Confederate counterpart would happen to be a Christian who would be so moved by the hymn that he couldn't pull the trigger of his Enfield rifle? It was a "*coincidence*" for sure—another instance of God being the "*guardian of our way*"—even in the *presence of our enemies*.

David knew this when he sang, "He prepares a table before me in the presence of mine enemies."¹⁴ Likewise, God is the *guardian of your way*—for, indeed, He prepares *the way* for you. When Jesus spoke to His disciples about His coming crucifixion, He told them that He would be going to Heaven to prepare a place for them, but they were not to worry, for they knew *the way*.

⁵ Thomas said to Him, "Lord, we don't know where You are going, so how can we know the way?" ⁶ Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." John 14:5-6 (NIV) When you accept Jesus Christ as the "*Way*" for your life, all the coincidences, all the seemingly random storms in your life, they begin to calm in the peace that comes with knowing "that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion" until the day of His return." Philippians 1:6 (NIV)¹⁵

Let me leave you with the words of Dr. Keith A. Mathison, a professor at Reformation Bible College. He tells us: "*So-called coincidences are a splash of water in the face . . . to us and to others who can tend to forget that our world is not simply matter in motion. God is always trying to tell us something.*"

Sometimes, we just don't listen very well."¹⁶ Yes, we need to be still and listen, and know that we have an awesome and all-powerful God who always has our best interests at heart.¹⁷ And even when the brokenness of this world sometimes exposes us to difficult and painful trials, God is still there, right beside you, and working even those bad things into good. Paul tells us this: "We know that all that happens to us is working for our good if we love God and are fitting into his plans." Romans 8:28 (TLB) **All things, all circumstances, all those "coincidences" of life—they are guided by the Hand of God—all ultimately for your good and your salvation. How can we be sure of this? Well, because of what Tim Tebow had written on his eye black—John 3:16. The singer-songwriter, David Crowder, tells us what John 3:16 means in one of his lyrics: "On a roughed cross, Jesus bled. On a roughed cross, Jesus bled. The sky went dark and the moon turned red, but there ain't no stopping love!"¹⁸ GOD DOES LOVE YOU—so much so that He sent His Son to die for your sins and mine. And, He most certainly has a plan for each and every one of you. Live in that plan—It is *the Way the Truth and the Life*. It is living in Jesus Christ. And when you do that, the coincidences of life will never look the same again.**

Let us pray.

Forest Hill Baptist Church
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Darvin Satterwhite, Pastor
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¹ John 3:16 (NASB) For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.

² CBN News, "Tim Tebow's Shocking Story About John 3:16 'Coincidence' Goes Viral," www1.cbn.com/cbnnews (01-07-2018).

³ Genesis 24:10 (TLB) He took with him ten of Abraham's camels loaded with samples of the best of everything his master owned and journeyed to Iraq, to Nahor's village.

⁴ Dr. Christopher Baird, "Science Questions with Surprising Answers," West Texas A&M University, <http://wtamu.edu> (September 18, 2013).

⁵ Genesis 37:28 (NLT2) So when the Ishmaelites, who were Midianite traders, came by, Joseph's brothers pulled him out of the cistern and sold him to them for twenty pieces of silver. And the traders took him to Egypt.

⁶ Jonah 1:17 (KJV) Now the LORD had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

⁷ Luke 2:1 (NIV) In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world.

⁸ Micah 5:2 (NIV) But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.

⁹ Matthew 2:1-2 (TLB) ¹ Jesus was born in the town of Bethlehem, in Judea, during the reign of King Herod. At about that time some astrologers from eastern lands arrived in Jerusalem, asking, ² "Where is the newborn King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in far-off eastern lands and have come to worship him."

¹⁰ Acts 8:30-36 (NIV) ³⁰ Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. "Do you understand what you are reading?" Philip asked. ³¹ "How can I," he said, "unless someone explains it to me?" So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. ³² The eunuch was reading this passage of Scripture: "He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb before the shearer is silent, so he did not open his mouth. ³³ In his humiliation he was deprived of justice. Who can speak of his descendants? For his life was taken from the earth." ³⁴ The eunuch asked Philip, "Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?" ³⁵ Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus. ³⁶ As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, "Look, here is water. Why shouldn't I be baptized?"

¹¹ Cleon L. Rogers, Jr. & Cleon L. Rogers, III, *The New Linguistic Exegetical Key to the Greek New Testament*, Luke 10:31, συγκυρία, Zondervan: Grand Rapids, p.134. See: "What does the Bible say about coincidence?" <https://www.gotquestions.org>.

¹² Isaiah 55:8-9 (TLB) ⁸ This plan of mine is not what you would work out, neither are my thoughts the same as yours! ⁹ For just as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than yours, and my thoughts than yours.

¹³ Kenneth R. Hendren, "In the Gun Sights," *Men of Integrity* (April 17, 2001), See: Craig Brian Larson & Phyllis Ten Elshof, Gen. Editors, 1001, "Sankey and the Sniper—Illustration 615," *Illustrations that Connect*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan (2008) p. 342.

¹⁴ Psalm 23:5 (KJV) Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

¹⁵ Philippians 1:6 (NIV) Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

¹⁶ Keith Mathison, *Mere Coincidence?* <https://www.ligonier.org>.

¹⁷ Psalm 46:10-11 (NIV) "Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth." ¹¹ The LORD Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.

¹⁸ David Crowder, from the album "I Know a Ghost," Capitol Christian Music Group (2018).