

## THE SUPERNATURAL IN THE BIBLE

by W. H. Griffith Thomas

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### 1. A Supernatural Creation

Everyone knows that no law of today will explain creation. There is not a single law in science that will account for the creation of anything. We have to go back to **Genesis**, “**In the beginning God created.**” But, says someone, are there not other records of the beginning beside the one in Genesis? Yes, there are about six or seven, and some of them are much like Genesis, but it is obvious to the discerning student that Genesis is the **inspired** account.

With all their similarities—and I would emphasize them to the full—there is one dissimilarity, and we all know that in accordance with inductive logic we have to account for dissimilarities as well as similarities if we wish to draw a proper conclusion. Every one of the other creation stories starts with an already existing chaos, which is equivalent to **Genesis 1:2**. Genesis alone goes back to “**In the beginning God.**”

The man of science thus starts with two things—for if we ask him this question, “What do you say was the beginning’?” he will answer, ‘Matter and motion.’” But we must go back further and ask “Who created matter, and who started motion?” Even if we accept the nebular hypothesis of Laplace, we are compelled to start with existing matter and existing motion. “Every effect must have its adequate cause.” And this is the teaching of Genesis 1:1.

### 2. A Supernatural Revelation

There is a revelation in the Old Testament, given in the first five books, and developed in the other thirty-four. It is given in the Pentateuch and then developed along three lines—along the line of *history* in outward expression; along the line of *poetry* in inward experience; and along the line of *prophecy* in onward expectation.

There are a great many things said today about dividing up the books of the Old Testament and editing them according to authorship—J and E and P and D and H, and so on, Even if this were all true, and we could absolutely divide the Old Testament up according to the most approved critical methods, we should still have to account for the supernatural revelation.

I have a good deal of sympathy with the man who said that the first person he wants to see in Heaven will be Deutero-Isaiah; I would go further and say that I want to see J and E and P and D and H as well. There is in the Bible a supernatural revelation. You have to account for that, no matter how the books were composed—though we may be sure they were not composed as the critics say.

### 3. A Supernatural Nation

I mean the Jews. Palestine is a wonderfully small place, equivalent in size to the state of Rhode Island, or about the area of Wales. On one side of it was the empire of Assyria, and afterward Babylon. On the other side was the great empire of Egypt, and on yet another side of it the empire of the Hittites. Within a very short time, any of those great empires could have crushed that little country like a steam hammer crushing a walnut. Yet Palestine lasted for hundreds of years. Why? Because of the supernatural element associated with it. And it would have lasted longer but for faithlessness. Wellhausen said he could not understand why Chemosh, the god of the Moabites, never developed into the god of heaven and earth like Yahweh (or Jehovah) the God of Israel. Of course, he could not, for he did not believe in the supernatural. We know that Chemosh was not god at all.

### 4. A Supernatural Expectation

This is sometimes called the argument from prophecy. The Old Testament prophets were able to foretell things to come.

How was it that Amos was able to foretell the captivity of Israel which happened forty years afterward?

How was it that **Isaiah 39:6-7** foretold the captivity to Babylon, when Babylon was an insignificant place compared with Assyria? He foretold the captivity 150 years before it took place, and it took place exactly as he had announced. This is quite apart from any question of the authorship of Isaiah 40 to 66. Here we have a statement which is either true or untrue. It is a definite statement that the people should be taken into captivity to Babylon when Babylon was not even one of the powers of the then known world.

We all remember the story of the wise men who came from the East and said, “Where is he that is born king of the Jews?” To them was quoted **Micah 5:2**, and that was written 800 years before Jesus Christ was born in Bethlehem.

There are many illustrations and instances of this argument from prediction, which we maintain is only capable of explanation by means of the supernatural.

## **5. A Supernatural Incarnation**

This brings us to the Gospels. I cannot now discuss a great deal that we know in connection with our Lord, but I wonder whether everyone is aware that in the whole realm of literature we cannot find a single instance of a perfect man or woman. Take all the poets from Homer down to the present day, all the dramatists of ancient and modern times, all the novelists with their wonderful analyses of character, all the philosophers and essayists, all the literary writers, all the geniuses of literature—there is not one that has once attempted to depict a perfect character.

Which is the most perfect character in Shakespeare? Some would say Hamlet or Desdemona, but neither is perfect. Which is the most perfect character in fiction? I have heard Colonel Newcome mentioned. Well, he was a fine old English gentleman, but he was not perfect.

Yet, here, in the four Gospels, written not by literary geniuses, but by ordinary men—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John - there has been for two thousand years the record of a perfect life. Did the record invent the character, or the character produce the records? As someone has said, if Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John invented the character of Jesus, we are in the presence of a literary miracle greater than anything that our Lord ever wrought.

The Gospels with their portrait of the perfect Man, are only to be explained on the basis of the supernatural.

## **6. A Supernatural Manifestation**

By this I mean the fact of the Christian church. We find in the book of the Acts of the Apostles, and in the New Testament epistles, the fact of a society which is called by a variety of names, but especially that of “the Church.” We know that there was no compulsion to join that company. There was very often no advantage, but on the contrary, real disadvantage in becoming a member. People were persecuted and put to death for belonging to the Christian Church.

Everyone admits that it began with the uniting together of a few people in the belief that their Master had risen from the dead, and this company of people has continued until this day and is increasing, until now we find it **almost everywhere - actually** in all parts of the world. How can we account for the fact that, without promise of earthly advantage that which we call the Christian Church has thus persisted? There is only one explanation; it is supernatural.

This is the fundamental value of the Christian church which we are sometimes too apt to forget. It possesses a supreme value when we think of it as a testimony to the supernatural. Whatever happens to the organized churches, or the professed followers of Christ, the real church—the body of Christ—will last—because, as the Lord says, the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.

There is no need for pessimism concerning the church of Christ as it is revealed generally in the New Testament, and especially in the epistle to the **Ephesians**. “**God is in the midst of her.**”

## **7. A Supernatural Confirmation**

I mention a confirmation of all the six points that have been mentioned—supernatural creation, supernatural revelation, supernatural nation, supernatural expectation, supernatural incarnation, and supernatural manifestation.

There are many things in connection with this confirmation worthy of our attention, but I can mention only two. There is the confirmation which comes from “the finality of Christianity.”

Let me imagine again an illustration which is as impossible as it can be. Suppose someone comes to me and says, “I have brought you the last book on botany.” I reply, “Of course, you mean the **latest** book on botany,” “No,” he says, “the last,” and he adds that no other book will ever be written on botany. Well, I should try to be polite, but of course I should not believe him.

The last book on any science cannot be written, but in the Bible we have not the latest, but the last word on sin, on redemption, on holiness, on immortality—and this Book has been before the world for nearly two thousand years.

## **To Sum Up**

I want to say, “**Let not your heart be troubled.**” You may have the most perfect confidence in regard to the Word of God because of the supernatural in it. When, some years ago, I was giving up the pastoral business—to read everything I could on the side

opposite to my own. I knew that at Oxford, and elsewhere, I should meet men familiar with modern criticism, and I wanted to know the positions. I have continued that practice up to now, and I can only say that as I have read one critical book after another, I have been more and more convinced that the historical critical position is wrong, and the conservative position on biblical authority is right. We have no need to fear if we keep the supernatural in view and apply this at every point to the material in the Bible.

Years ago, an American lady was attending a Bible class in Fifth Avenue conducted by Dr. W. M. Thomson. One day a professor from a New York College, learning that she had just come from this Bible class, said with a sneer, "But you don't believe this Book, do you?" With a smile, she answered, "Oh yes, I happen to have a personal acquaintance with the Author." That is the test the verification of personal experience, which crowns everything else.

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### **W. H. GRIFFITH THOMAS**

William Henry Griffith Thomas was born in England in 1861. His mother was widowed before he was born. He spent his early years living with his grandfather. When he was just 16 years old Griffith Thomas was asked to teach a Sunday School class at Holy Trinity Church.

W. H. later worked in his uncle's office in London, and for many years developed the discipline of using the time from 10:30 P.M. to 2:30 A.M. for serious Bible study. He studied at King's College, became pastor of St. Aldate's Anglican Church in Oxford, and graduated from the University in 1895.

W. H. Griffith Thomas and his family moved to Toronto in 1910, where he joined the faculty of Wycliffe College and taught Old Testament literature and exegesis. In 1919, the family moved to Philadelphia, and there W. H. carried on an extensive conference and writing ministry. He published 26 Bible study booklets and 24 larger works. His advice to young preachers was: "Think yourself empty; read yourself full; write yourself clear; pray yourself clean, and then enter the pulpit and let yourself go."

Griffith Thomas died in 1924. He never attempted to be sensational; he only wanted to be biblical. He was a trusted scholar, and had the unusual ability to state profound truth with a clearness and a simplicity which very few possess.

—Harold S. Martin