

Pastor Jeremy M. Thomas
Fredericksburg Bible Church
107 East Austin
Fredericksburg, Texas 78624
830-997-8834 jthomas@fbgbible.org

B0904 – January 25, 2009 – The Doctrine Of Inspiration & Canonicity

We want to deal with the two doctrines subsidiary to the doctrine of revelation. We spent an extensive amount of time on the doctrine of revelation because it's been a specific area under attack in the last 200 years. Those attacks have largely been generated due to false worldviews, false belief systems, philosophies of life that exclude the possibility of God speaking coherently to man. These theories recognized something correct, that human language was limited, we can get ourselves tangled in paradoxes, such paradoxes as the Cretan's paradox, but incorrectly they applied the inherent limitations of human language to the Creator and said, "If *we* don't have a perfect system of language then God can't either since He's subject to the same limitations we are." That's the logic they were using. But it's a logic that rejected the Creator-creature distinction and applied equally to God and man. This is why we said in the first part of this class, last year, whenever you think of God you should never think of God and man under the same principle or idea, as if God and man are both a part of the same existence, both subject to the same principles of cause-effect, both surrounded by the same mystery. When you do that you are thinking in terms of the Continuity of Being where God is just higher on the scale than you, everything is just a gradation of the one same and continuous Being and there are certain categories, certain principles that stand above God and man to which both are subject. In the case of language, maybe His speech is more coherent than ours but it's still of the same nature, it's still subject to limitations and therefore incapable of expressing truth. The biblical view of language is that you have the Creator-creature distinction and forever these two are not the same, there's a boundary uncrossable here. And what we have as creatures made in His image, is a finite replica of His language, finite because it's created. But His language is not created. His language is and ever has been,

the eternal word of God, and as eternal there has always been perfect language expression between the members of the Trinity and so He has what we might call a hyper-language or meta-language, something that functions *in* the Creator domain and *upon* the creature domain, it brought this domain into existence out of nothing, His speech can do that, ours can't do that and therefore His language does not suffer the impediments of our fallen, limited speech. We have to, as 21st century Christians, be very careful here with language because most evangelicals have been infected with these pagan views of language and when you do that it's a short step to denying revelation and the inspiration of Scripture. To show you how precise you have to be, think about revelation and inspiration. What do we have in the Scriptures? We have God speaking in human language, He's accommodating Himself to us so we can understand. But if you're not careful you'll slip because it is human language here after all, and that's limited. But who's speaking the human language? God is, not man, and He's not limited, He's accommodating to us to reveal Himself to us. And a second thing here is that all that is needed is a verbal communication that is sufficient for God to get what He wants to say across. And so we're insisting that human language is sufficient for that. Yes it has limitations, it's not perfect, but it is sufficient for communicating truth from the mind of God to the mind of man. Therefore we insist on verbal revelation, and if you were a 19th century liberal standing on Mt Sinai you'd have a hard time rejecting verbal revelation. It was perfectly clear, you could have, if you had a recording studio, recorded in the Hebrew language the voice of God and played it back over and over, and that is essentially the argument we are making, that God spoke from outside of history into history. That's why one of the emphases of this course is the historicity of these events, if these things didn't happen in real space-time history then you don't have Christianity. It's that simple. If you don't have Mt Sinai then there is a barrier between God and man and you can yak yak yak all day long about what God is like, but that's all it is, your projections of what God might be like, you don't know, how could you possibly know? That's the dilemma of modern man, left alone in an impersonal universe the only thing you can know is that no one knows, no one has truth.

Alright, we want to get into the doctrine of inspiration. Here's a diagram to see the relationship between revelation and inspiration.



Inspiration is a subset of revelation. All we're saying here is God revealed more than was actually written down and preserved in the documents. The doctrine of inspiration, the word "inspire," comes from 2 Tim 3:16; that's historically where that word came from. We read this verse every week in the second worship hour because it's the substance of our faith, we're gathering each time we get together in sort of a circle around the word of God. What is this thing we call the Scriptures? That's what Paul's telling young Timothy. Is this just a book? What is this we're so concerned with? In 2 Tim 3:16 Paul says, "All scripture is inspired by God," *theopneustos* in the Greek, forget the word "inspired" for a minute, it carries a lot of baggage in our culture, we hear the word and it's sort of this amorphous thing that some painter or poet was inspired to create his art, that's not what we're saying. This word *theopneustos* is two parts, *theos*, God, and *pneustos*, breath, God's breath or God breathed, that's what we're saying about the Scriptures, the NIV captures this, "All Scripture is God-breathed," and it's a word that Paul coined apparently, you can't find it in Greek dictionaries, it doesn't exist anywhere in Greek pagan culture. It's just a word he made up to teach that the Scriptures came from God. He's not denying that human beings picked up their stylus, dipped it in ink and wrote it on the parchment, he's just saying that somehow God superintended the process so that no matter how the men got the word of God, whether they heard the word, whether they saw a vision, whether they researched by personal interview like Luke, however they got it, the final written product was from God.

Now, going back to our diagram, inspiration is down here as a subset, a small part of all God revealed. Turn to the Gospel of John, chapter 21. There are lots of things God said that didn't get written down. It was, so to speak,

uncaptured by human authors. There's a little note, a very famous note at the end of John's gospel, that you've undoubtedly seen if you read the Bible, but it gives you an idea of how much we've lost, never to have found again. Our curiosity would love to find these things and perhaps one day we'll have access through some of the eyes that saw them. Look at what John says in John 21:24-25, "This is the disciple who is testifying to these things and wrote these things, and we know that his testimony is true. ²⁵And there are also many other things which Jesus did, which if they were written in detail, I suppose that even the world itself would not contain the books that would be written." So obviously a lot of material was not written down, there's a lot that's not here in the Bible. That's why in that diagram I picture revelation as bigger than inspiration; inspiration deals only with what was captured by men and preserved in Scriptures. Think of it this way, if we had a recording device that was triggered by the voice of God, it knew His voice and aha, that's God and it picked up everything God had ever said from the beginning of creation and we got all the recordings together, let's say we have a hundred CD's, and then we compare that to what we have in the Scripture and we have only 10, that's the difference between revelation and inspiration. Why don't we have the other 90 CD's? Apparently because it's not what He wanted written down. It had nothing to do with men who were irresponsible and didn't write it down. It's just that God said some things that were only for Daniel, not for everybody else. That's His prerogative. In the end, what is written down is what is for everybody, and that is sufficient, it's all that is necessary.

Let's think, why is it necessary to have an inspired Scripture? Why is it necessary that the Scripture that God has given us be inerrant? What are the Scriptures, ultimately? What do we say that God did with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and their nation that is not true of any other nation on earth? What is the one feature that's absolutely unique to Israel? God made a covenant. What's a covenant? It's a contract, a written document complete with parties, terms outlining the agreement, I'll do this, this is what my behavior will be like and you do that, that's what your behavior should look like, and then you come along and sign the contract, put your name on the dotted line, I will keep my end of the bargain. Now you've got a contract outlining all these details. What do you have to do to follow up a covenant to make sure the covenant isn't broken? You've got to have a record of behavior. What has to be true of that record if it's going to stand up in a court of law? It has to be

inerrant. If it's not then it's a false witness and it's thrown out of court. That's why conceptually what you're looking at here, what you hold in your hand is a record of behavior of God and man that is to be the indictment against man on the basis of a covenant. The Scriptures are the record of the behavior. We fundamentalists are not out there trying to invent some doctrine of inspiration and inerrancy just to be a thorn in everyone's side. Inspiration and inerrancy flow naturally out of the idea of the Bible as a covenant.

Here are a few quotes to show you that the fundamentalists weren't the first people to think this up. Here's some ammunition for you to use when someone comes in and says this was all dreamed up by the fundamentalists in the early 1900's. So every quote I'm going to give you is pre-1900, fundamentalists in the modern sense weren't even around yet. Look at the belief historically in the inerrancy of the Bible. Gregory of Nazianzus, early centuries of the church, *"Even the smallest lines in Scripture are due to the minute care of the Holy Spirit, so that we must pay careful attention to every slightest shade of meaning"* (Orat. 2, 105). *"Within Roman Catholicism Augustine said, 'I believe most firmly that no one of those authors has erred in any respect in writing.'*" At the time of the Reformation Luther wrote, *"I confidently believe that not one of their authors erred;"*ⁱ Another great author from the Reformed tradition, John Calvin noted *"He [God] determined that the same oracles...should be committed to public records..."*ⁱⁱ what he means is written down, the words of God were written down. Why? Because this is a contractual document, that's why? How else are you going to measure someone's behavior if you don't have it preserved faithfully? You can't really preserve oral tradition that well. So they wrote this stuff down. Then people centuries later can pick it up and read it and measure God's faithfulness. But you say, those men were friends of the Bible, yes, they were friends of the Bible, they were convinced of the Scripture but here's a modern liberal theologian, F. C. Grant, no friend of the Bible. He admits, quote, *"it is everywhere taken for granted that Scripture...is inerrant."* Obviously then this is not a doctrine generated in modern times by fundamentalists.

To see another place where inerrancy is held up to be very important is in the OT, turn to Deut 4:2. The Old and New Testaments warn against tampering with the text, don't change, don't add, don't subtract anything that is written, that's sacred because it's part of the contract. Verse 2, "You shall not add to the word which I am commanding you, nor take away from it, that you may

keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you.” What’s the reason? That you may keep the commandments of the Lord. That’s part of the contract, they agreed to keep the commandments, those were the terms of the contract. If you break that there’s cursing. And if you start finagling with the commandments then pretty soon you can’t follow them. For the NT parallel to Deut 4 turn to Rev 22, the last chapter of the Bible. How *appropriate* that John would receive this revelation right at the close of revelatory history. You don’t find this at the end of Ephesians, you don’t find this in the Gospel of John. But at the end of Revelation, v 18, “I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues which are written in this book; ¹⁹and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book.” Does that sound like God’s serious about keeping this contractual terminology straight? Of course He is, because all of history has got to be measured against the contract, you can’t change the ruler, that’s what you use to measure everything against.

The last idea we want to interact with respect to inerrancy we want to deal with very briefly. For centuries people have tried to show there are errors in the Bible. This isn’t a new thing. Every once in awhile someone says to you, “The Bible has errors in it,” and they pick and choose certain examples to try to discredit the witness. It’s the same old story. It goes back to the serpent and Eve in the garden, what did Satan ask the woman? “Has God said?” Doubt, doubt, doubt. It’s the same old argument regurgitated and recapitulated. What do we say to this? Well for one these people are not so profound, they think they’re profound, but people have been doing this for centuries and Christians have answered the supposed contradictions over and over and over. The answers are there. But on a deeper level the answer to this problem can be framed another way. “On what basis do you reject the inerrancy of Scripture?” “If you reject the inerrancy of Scripture aren’t you erecting another standard outside the Scriptures? How do you know your standard is the proper measure? How do you know your measuring stick is correct? Here’s where you go on the attack because if someone makes a negative claim against the Bible he’s also making a positive claim to his standard. But to claim he has this standard over here that stands in judgment over the Scriptures, is essentially a claim of inerrancy. He hasn’t gotten rid of inerrancy, he’s just transferred it somewhere else. And in the

end it comes down to either God and his word is inerrant or man and his word is inerrant. You can't have it both ways. Somewhere the inerrancy has to rest. In summary, everybody believes in inerrancy, it's just a matter of where you locate it. If you don't have inerrancy then you can't make any kind of value claim, you can't make any kind of moral judgment, you can't make any kind of claim to knowledge. All values become equal; all truth claims become equivalent. So, you can complain about the Bible's inerrancy, but let's be honest, you haven't gotten rid of inerrancy.

Let's turn to the second thing that falls out of the doctrine of revelation and that's the doctrine of canonicity. After we have the idea of revelation, that God speaks, and I understand inspiration, that when God speaks in the Scriptures He speaks through human beings in human vocabulary and He superintends that so I get an inerrant Bible then I have to ask two questions. One, what is the source of canonicity? And two, how do I know which books are inspired? What are the boundaries of the canon?

So we want to take these up in order. First, what is the source of canonicity? The Roman Catholic/Protestant debate is right here on the issue of where the canon comes from. What role did the church play in the establishment of the canon? The Protestant position is that the Bible came through the church but once the Bible comes into existence the Bible, not the church, is the authority. Rome says no, we believe that the church is the continuing authority and so there's a big debate. But that's the nature of the discussion. Rome claims to be the custodian of the Scriptures and they control the proper interpretation of the Scriptures through their expert interpreters, whatever they say, that goes, so the Church is the authority. The Protestants say no, the Bible is the authority and we submit to the Bible, not the Church.

The Liberal has a slightly different view. They say the OT is just a patchwork thrown together solely by humans. And over time the community of Jews said, "This is canon, this is not," but it was all just Jewish opinion. Apart from the fact there's no archaeological evidence of this I want to take you to Judges 18. This is one of the passages the liberals seize to get their view across. You may not have noticed these as having any significance to this as you read your Bible. Judges 18:30, it's not quite clear in some of the translations but this is a little remark somebody put in the text after the text was written. And it explains things. The guy who put this in was probably a

prophet, a later prophet who brought it up to date. It says, “And the sons of Dan set up for themselves the graven image; and Jonathan, the son of Gershom, the son of Manasseh, he and his sons were priests to the tribe of the Danites until the day of the captivity of the land.” When was the captivity of the land? 586 BC, and there were earlier captivities of course. But the idea, see “until the day of the captivity of the land,” that’s a historical note. Liberals seize on that particular note and say “See, that’s an argument for late authorship.” No, not necessarily, that is a note by a prophet who kept the text up to date until that time.

You can see another one in 1 Sam 9:9. This is not arguing that the Bible has been tampered with; the prophets were the custodians of it. In verse 8, there’s a big long story that’s going on there, and the servant is talking to Saul about this and that. In verse 9 some of your translations have it in parenthesis, but if you look at it, think about what verse 9 is saying, that’s another one of those little historical notices, put in there probably by a later prophet, to clarify the text. “(Formerly in Israel, when a man went to inquire of God, he used to say, ‘Come, and let us go to the seer;’ for he who is called a prophet now was formerly called a seer.)” That was put in there by somebody who said, “The terminology “seer” is outdated, we don’t use that anymore and if I don’t explain to them that what we call a “prophet” used to be a “seer” nobody will understand. But we have to know that this was written back in those days, so the note here is not proof that this was written late by some fanciful Jew, it’s just showing that the text written earlier were explained by later prophets. They would go in and make these little remarks. There are lots of these in the OT.

There’s another thing about the prophets, take 2 Chron 9:29, I just want to point out some Scripture that was written but was never captured in the Canon, and here’s a reference to some of them. “Now the rest of the acts of Solomon, from first to last, are they not written in the records of Nathan the prophet, and in the prophecy of Ahijah the Shilonite, and in the visions of Iddo the seer concerning Jeroboam the son of Nebat?” Now tell me where are those books are. Those, evidently, were the first texts, like diaries kept, and notice what’s common to all three of those? Nathan, Ahijah and Iddo, apparently they are all prophets. They’re not the kings, notice who’s not keeping the records. It’s not the kings that are keeping the records. Who’s keeping the records? The prophets are, there’s a prophetic line, many of them

we know their names but many we don't know. We know Nathan but who's Iddo? Well, he's a genuine prophet who stands in the stream of historical revelation. He wrote things down. These are the guys who kept the diaries of what was going on because they are the ones who are chosen specially by God to have the inside scoop and to capture those moments of history and their meaning. And they were the ones from whom all the rest of the Bible was written.

Some of what they wrote is probably captured by other prophets later on in collections. To show you they did collect from these diaries turn to Prov 25. You had this stream of prophets from Moses to Malachi and in the stream all these diaries, notes would be kept and then a prophet would come along later and compile these into a collection. And here we have that described in verse 1, "These also are proverbs of Solomon which the men of Hezekiah, king of Judah, transcribed." Transcribed, that's the word for copied, they took old writings of Solomon and copied them into a single collection. That's all the men of Hezekiah did. They didn't change anything, they just brought together under God's discretion what he wanted in the canon. They didn't take everything; they only took some things out of Solomon's diary. But what they did take was what God wanted them to take, it all happened under His superintendence.

Now we have the problem of what books constitute the canon. Turn to Deut 13, the OT gives us the precedent, it gives theological tests to prove or disprove a prophet. Here's one that may surprise you, "If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and gives you a sign or a wonder, ²and the sign or the wonder comes true, concerning which he spoke to you, saying, 'Let us go after other gods (whom you have not known) and let us serve them,' ³you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams;" this is a situation where a guy comes along, someone like Nostradamus, he prophesies the future and he does a wonder or a miracle and then his prophecy comes true, it happens. This is a great thing that happens, this is no cheapo, this is the genuine article but along with that, while you're all mesmerized by the predictive genius of this person he says, "Let's worship the golden calf as a symbol that took us out of Egypt." And you say, "Gee, the guy predicted the future," the guy predicts the rise and fall of the stock market, he gives the projections to the dime for the next year, "Look what he can do, he must be a genuine prophet, whatever he says is

instruction from the living God.” and you go after him, if you do that you’ve made a fatal mistake, do not go after that prophet. This is a litmus test, it’s a test God gave these people, God sent them false prophets to see if they would measure a prophet by what he could do or by the word of God. Do you really love Me? That’s what it gets down to. Do you really love Me? If you do you will keep My commandments. Love is always defined in terms of obedience. That might not turn you on. That may seem dry and boring to you because you’ve got a sensual, experience, it felt right mentality of love, that’s not the issue. Those are the people who feel their way through Christianity and life is a roller coast for these people. That’s the vast majority of the Christians, they see some great thing, they have some great experience, they have a rocky mountain high at youth camp, they love the Lord, they re-dedicate their lives to the Lord and walk the aisle to tell the whole church about it, how they’re going to do great things for the Lord and two weeks later their completely deflated. It’s like they never went to camp, no lasting change. It’s a false system. The issue isn’t the subjective experience; the issue is the objective loyalty to the word of God. The word of God gives stability. So that’s the theological test, are you going to exalt your experience above the revelation of God or the revelation of God above your experience?

The other test in the OT is Deut 18. This is the negative test, chapter 13 is the positive test, what the prophet says does come to pass. Verse 21, “You may say in your heart, ‘How will we know the word which the LORD has not spoken?’”²² “When a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the thing does not come about or come true,” it doesn’t come to pass, then that obviously is not what the Lord has spoken. So the OT was very clear on how to test a prophet, if it did come to pass and if it didn’t come to pass, there were clear instructions on each, it wasn’t enough for someone to predict the future and it happen, that’s not sufficient, it had to be completely in harmony with the other prophets and the prophet had to stand in the stream of prophets, it couldn’t be just one guy standing outside that stream. Remember we said revelation is intermittent, it doesn’t happen all the time. God turns the loudspeaker on and talks for awhile and then He shuts it off and during that period you’re operating on what He has said in the Scriptures. And we should add, it wasn’t a thing to be taken lightly, someone who claimed to be a prophet and wasn’t what was the penalty in verse 20? It was a capital offense. You’d take him out and execute him. God took this very seriously; the word of God is a serious thing and thus serious penalties.

I hope that gives you some sort of a flavor for the fact that out of the Mt. Sinai vision you have God speaking from the top of a mountain, you have Him speaking publicly and audibly, it's not some sort of psychological experience, it's not some sort of contemplating your navel, it was the voice of God that could be recorded with an audio recorder. And it was written, who wrote it? Up on Mt Sinai who wrote the first law? God wrote it, the finger of God, He wrote it on a small rock and Moses brought it back down. So God Himself not only spoke, He wrote it, with all due apology to the historians who don't believe alphabets existed at this time, it's funny, God had the alphabet, He must have, He wrote it, in an alphabetic script. So here we have the generation of Scripture and we have the line of prophets that update archaic terms, compile previous works into collections and they protect it with their lives until the whole era of revelation is finished in the time of Malachi, the Canon is closed, and when that Canon is closed, nobody adds to it, nobody, not even the Church can add to it. It was faithfully preserved and guarded. The Roman Catholic Church wants to come along and add the apocrypha, fourteen books written between the OT and the NT and out of that you get all these strange doctrines, prayers for the dead, worshipping angels. The problem is the apocrypha books themselves admit there was no living prophet. How are you getting revelation with no prophets? But at the time of the Reformation, at the Council of Trent, because the Protestant Reformers were making such dents in the people's loyalty to Rome. I mean, they were drawing a lot of people away from Rome and that's a lot of money, they were losing millions and millions of dollars and they were grasping at straws to stop the mass exodus. Luther and Calvin, Zwingli, these guys were condemning the abuses of the Roman Church, I read my Bible, I don't find anything about indulgences, why are you doing this? And so Rome called a council, the Council of Trent in 1546 and one of the first things they did to try to justify their practices was to make the Apocrypha Scripture. It had never been viewed that way before, it had always been included in the Bible and placed between the Old and New Testaments but it was not accepted as equally authoritative, it was just history, but they said, it's Scripture just as much as the Gospel of Matthew and they did this because those books justified some of their practices. That's what happened historically but the argument won't hold because those books don't stand up to the biblical criteria. There were no living prophets. The same story goes for the Koran, you don't have a stream of prophets, it's just one guy out in a desert saying he

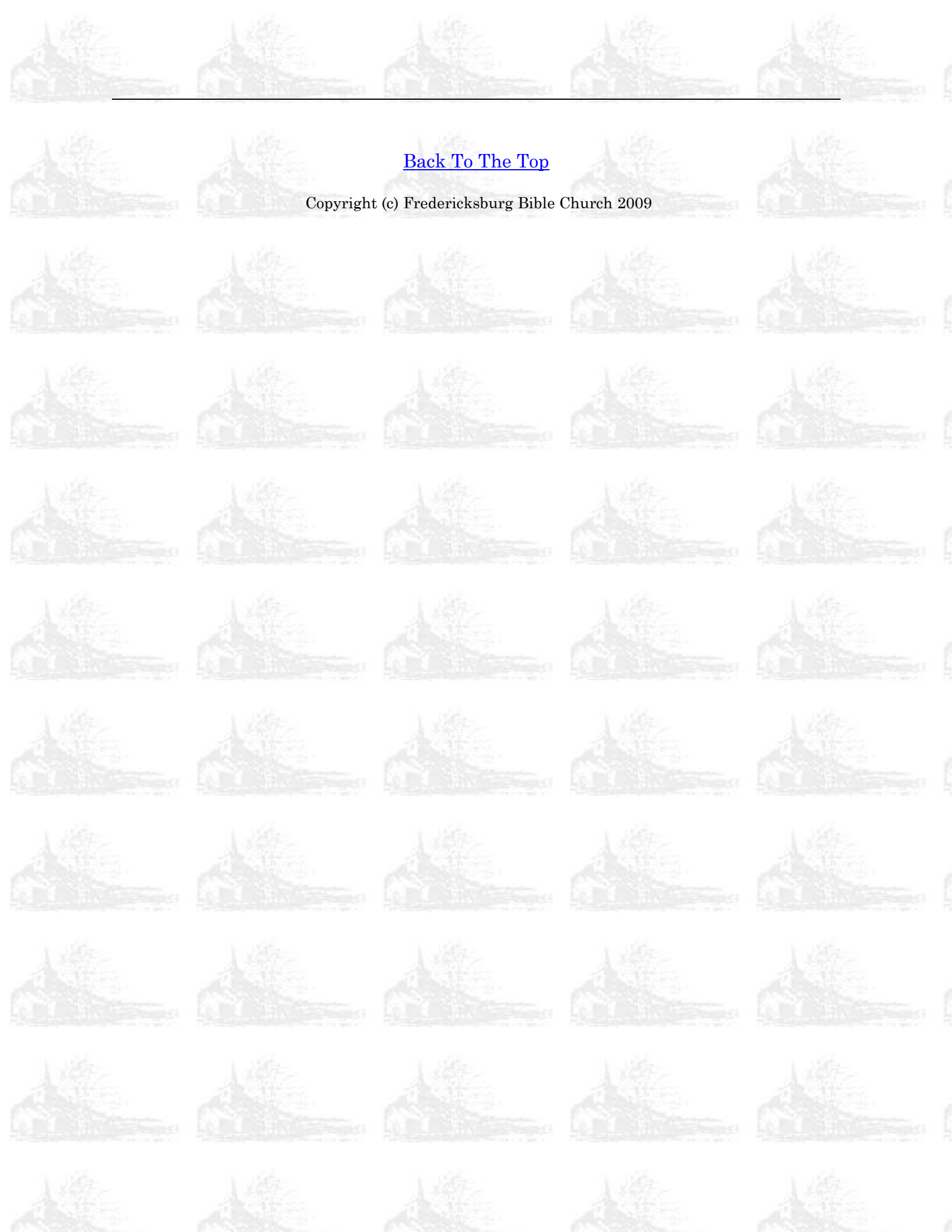
had a vision, you never find that in the Bible, there's always a succession of contemporaneous prophets or NT apostles that oversee each others works and then it comes to a close, you never just have a Mohammed or a Joseph Smith, some self-proclaimed prophet who stands outside the prophetic stream. That's not the way God does these things.

So remember this all attaches to the historical event at Mt Sinai. You don't want to separate the doctrine from the historical event and so when you teach your children about Mt Sinai, when you think about it yourself, you want your mind to gravitate to these three doctrines; revelation, inspiration and canonicity, what books are in the Bible, why only these books. What this does by visualizing God speaking at Mt Sinai is it keeps the doctrine grounded. We have a tendency as Greeks to think abstractly. The Hebrew way of thinking was much more concrete. The problem for us as Gentile thinkers is we don't live in an abstract world, we live in a real world with real problems and if you learn doctrine abstractly you can't connect it to your life, so we're fighting against that by tying these doctrines down, rooting them to these historical events. And the Mt Sinai event is the historical event we need to visualize and cycle through our mind when we start doubting the Scriptures, "Did God really say this? Can I really trust the Scriptures?" And when doubt creeps in it doesn't take long before your whole Christian life is falling apart. Doubt is the opposite of trust. If you're doubting God's promises you're not trusting Him. You can't trust His promises if you're not really sure He spoke them to begin with and gradually it eats away at your faith till there's nothing left. And you think, what happened? How did I get way over here? The counter to that that tendency we all have is the audio-visual event at Mt Sinai. Let that encapture the imaginative waters, it's a powerful image and it protects you from the pagan agenda.

Alright, next week we're going to start a whole new area which deals with the next great historical event, the most controversial area of the Scriptures probably, and every skeptic alive likes to crucify us on the fact that God in the OT is such a cruel God, He killed people, slaughtered everybody. Yes he did, not everybody, He was nice to some people, but He did order mass execution, genocide. What we want to deal with is why there is genocide in the Bible.

ⁱ Quoted by Rene Pache, *The Inspiration and Authority of Scripture*, 235.

ⁱⁱ *Ibid.*, 236.



[Back To The Top](#)

Copyright (c) Fredericksburg Bible Church 2009