

# ***“Seeing God’s Voice”***

Robert M. Thompson, Pastor

**Corinth Reformed Church**  
150 Sixteenth Avenue NW  
Hickory, North Carolina 28601  
828.328.6196 [corinthtoday.org](http://corinthtoday.org)

*(© 2022 by Robert M. Thompson. Manuscripts and video also available at [corinthtoday.org/sermons](http://corinthtoday.org/sermons).  
Unless otherwise indicated, Scriptures quoted are from 2011 New International Version.)*

***When you can’t hear God through the prophets, see his voice in Jesus.***

***Hebrews 1:1-4***

***May 1, 2022***

***Not that Barney***

I don’t know that there is or ever has been a human being who wouldn’t want to hear God’s voice. Even those who aren’t sure they believe in God might say, “Well, if there is a God, hearing him talk out loud would be convincing and helpful.”

Most of you listening to me are quite sure there is a God. But as believers, we sometimes have doubts, questions, or problems. Hearing God’s voice would be grand.

Some believers claim to hear God speak out loud – once or maybe often. They often feel on the defensive. They can’t say, “I’ll prove it to you. God, talk again!” If God does speak audibly, he doesn’t do it on demand.

This sermon is directed to the majority of us who don’t hear God talk out loud. This is a sermon about God speaking, because that’s how the New Testament book we call Hebrews begins. I’ll begin the sermon with what this author says about God speaking. At the end of the sermon I’ll try to connect God speaking to you and me.

Of all the books in the New Testament, Hebrews presents the greatest mystery concerning its author. Nobody knows, and the options are many. We don’t know who wrote Hebrews, but “The writer of Hebrews is too impersonal.” Whoever it was, the author was a real person writing to a real community of Jesus followers.

To me, at least, the writer needs a name. At some risk to diverting your attention, I’m going to call him “Barney.” The risk is that you’ll start thinking about a different Barney – the purple dinosaur, Barney Fife, or Barney on How I Met Your Mother. I’m not talking about any of them. Stop thinking about those Barneys.

Why did I choose Barney? First, Barney was my grandfather's name. He was a missionary to India for 50 years, well-educated and intelligent, who evangelized and preached and taught and wrote. He was also a bit of a mystery to me, since I never knew him well. That fits the writer of Hebrews.

Second, Barney is short for Barnabas, who's a fairly good guess for the writer of Hebrews. Tertullian, a second century church leader from Tunisia in Africa, not only said that Barnabas wrote Hebrews, but implied that it was a common view. Barnabas means "Encourager." At the end of Hebrews, the writer calls this work "a word of encouragement." Since your guess is no better than mine, and because I'm the preacher and not you, I'm calling our writer Barney.

### ***Polymers, polytropes, and charakter***

Barney starts the book of Hebrews this way.

In polymers and polytropes, God, having spoken long ago to the fathers through the prophets, in these last days he has spoken to us in a Son.

If you don't know what polymers and polytropes are, good! That's my first point about Hebrews. Those are Greek words, but they are also actual English words. Many of Barney's original readers wouldn't have known what polymers and polytropes were either. His Greek vocabulary exceeds that of most of his contemporaries. He uses about 150 words unique to Hebrews, including these two words.

If you're looking for a book of the Bible that places the cookies and milk on the bottom shelf, Hebrews is not your book. There are plenty of New Testament books for beginners in the faith – Mark, John, Philippians, 1 John.

Barney will tell us later in this book that too many Christians are still milk-guzzling babies when they should be carnivores. Hebrews is meat. I'm going to try my best to make Hebrews accessible to you, but it's going to require some work on your part. We're also offering a small commentary called *Hebrews for Everyone*, by a rather eminent scholar named N. T. Wright who's good at cutting meat into bite size proportions.

So what are polymers and polytropes? Those are transliterations of Greek words that appear in the New International Version as "at many times and in various ways." What Barney is talking about is what we call the Old Testament. "The prophets" are not just Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Hosea, but include Moses, Miriam, Balaam, Elijah, and David. God used these prophets to speak through visions, parables, poems, music, sermons, miracles, predictions, a burning bush, fire, earthquake, handwriting, plagues, miracles, military wins and losses, even a donkey. So many ways at various times.

That phrase about polymers and polytropes is a dependent clause that sets up not only the introductory paragraph but of all of Hebrews. In the past God's voice was heard through prophets, but "in these last days" God has spoken through a Son. God has a new communication strategy, and it's so much better!

In these opening verses Barney doesn't call God's Son by a name. He will in chapter 2, and yes, you know who he's talking about. Before Barney names God's Son, he wants you to know why God's voice through a Son is infinitely better than prophets. In each contrast, there is a direct connection with what we call the Old Testament. Both Barney and his readers were familiar with "the prophets," and he uses that fact.

First, "his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things." This is a reference to Psalm 2, which must have puzzled believers for centuries. God says to someone in that psalm, "You are my son; today I have become your father. Ask me, and I will make the nations your inheritance." Barney says we now have a solution to that mysterious line. No prophet ever claimed Psalm 2 was about him.

Second, "through whom also he made the universe" (in Greek, "the ages"). The son existed before time or space and caused it all to be. No prophet could say that.

Third, "The son is the radiance of God's glory." Glory is a common theme in the Old Testament, especially in Exodus, Psalms, Isaiah, and Ezekiel. Radiance seems too weak. Effulgence is better, but who uses that word? Splendor, brilliance. Our sun is probably the best comparison to the idea of glory, but don't think of the Son as a reflector – like the moon. The son of God compares to the rays of light emanating from the sun. He's how the sun's splendor connects to earth. Prophets talked about the glory. The Son is the glory.

Fourth, "the exact representation of his being." This is another one of those Greek words unique to Hebrews in the New Testament. But you actually know it. It's the word *charakter*. We use it to describe distinguishing moral characteristics. Originally it was unique physical features. The closest thing the ancient world could imagine to what we call a photograph was a carefully carved mold into which hot metal could be poured to show the *charakter* (the exact duplication) of the emperor's face. With better imaging, we might say the son is God on HDTV. Prophets were not.

Fifth, what's the son doing now? He's "sustaining all things by his powerful word." A better translation might be "his enabling word." If you want to hear God's voice, examine all things from distant galaxies to minuscule atoms. The son's word triggers and sustains the laws of physics. Prophets don't do that.

Sixth, the son "provided purification for sins." Anyone at all familiar with the Old Testament knows that sin is a persistent, destructive, deceitful problem that had temporary but unsatisfactory solutions in the blood of lambs and bulls. Barney will talk much more about this, but the son accomplished what no prophet ever could.

Finally, the son “sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.” Sitting at God’s right hand conveys not only authority but completion. He doesn’t have anything more to do because it’s all been done. No prophet can say, “I’m done. All’s well.”

Do you see what Barney is doing here? He’s differentiating between prophets and a son, which is between writings and a person, between letters and touch, between humans and God. He’s also distinguishing between *hearing* and *seeing* God’s voice.

All these phrases Barney uses to describe the Son’s work are *visual*. If you want to hear God, listen to the prophets. If you want to see God, look at Jesus. Jesus is God made visible. When you see God in creation, Jesus did that. When you see God’s brilliance, you see Jesus. When you want to know how God acts, look at his exact representation in Jesus. When you look at the cross, you see Jesus. When you tackle a project, any project, and say “It’s finished,” you see Jesus.

Hebrews is about seeing God’s voice even when you can’t hear it. Barney knows it’s sometimes hard to hear God talking, but if you’ll look at how God “spoke” through Jesus, you have what we call a visual aid. You know I love a good sermon Power Point. It’s because I’m such a visual learner. Jesus is God’s Power Point that provides a megaphone for your eyes.

### ***Solid food***

There’s one more verse in this introductory paragraph. Some translations move verse 4 to the next section, but I think it fits well here. The Son is also “much superior to the angels.” The reference to angels broadens the reach of Hebrews. The most likely scenario is that Hebrews is a letter or sermon Barney composed for a house church made up of well-educated, Greek speaking Jews who had come to believe in Jesus. We’ll have much more to say about them as we continue our study.

Angels feature prominently in the Old Testament, but Jews weren’t the only ones who believed in angels. Greeks and Sikhs, Romans and Zoroastrians, they all believed in angels of one kind or another. So do many people today. Barney does too. He believes in angels, but he also thinks angels are the baby food of faith. To call Jesus an angel is to demote him. Barney uses the rest of chapter 1 to make that point from the prophets.

A lot of Christians find the Old Testament confusing. They like to stay with the Gospels or the New Testament letters. They think the Old Testament is for mature Christians. Barney has two things to say about that.

First, don’t ever talk about Old Testament v. New Testament like they’re Zelensky vs. Putin, enemies framing opposite world views. Barney insists that a community of Jesus followers is worshipping the same God – a Creator and sustainer who

speaks. In times past the ancestors could hear his voice through prophets, but now you can see his voice in a Son.

And second, you're thinking backwards. The Old Testament was milk. If you're asking questions like...

- "Why was God so violent in the Old Testament?"
- "Where is God when I hurt?"
- "How many rules do I have to obey to get God to love me?"
- "How do I get wisdom for daily living?"

...you're asking first questions, primary and middle school questions. They're important, and you need prophets to help you hear God's answers.

Let me end this first sermon in Hebrews with a challenge. Hebrews is steak. It might even be tough at times. Stay with it anyway.

Linda and I have a granddaughter who's just learning to eat solid food. Holding babies while they drink milk is absolutely priceless, but nobody wants a 2-year-old, much less a 30-year-old or 75-year-old, drinking only milk. Hebrews is one of the most challenging books of the Bible. In some ways it's like climbing Kilimanjaro. The view at the top is breathtaking, but the climb is harder than you think and carries risks you haven't yet imagined. Maybe that's one reason this is the first time in my three decades at Corinth I've ever preached through Hebrews. I'm not promising easy.

Here's what I ask of you. Use this study in Hebrews to push yourself spiritually. What's your current level of discipleship, of intimacy with Jesus, of holiness, of passion for justice and goodness in the world around you? Framed negatively, where are you stuck? Where have you plateaued? Where have you decided your life with Jesus is good enough and requires nothing further from you?

We live in a world of so many competing voices. The deafening cacophony of noises screaming for our attention is at times maddening. Would you spend some time looking at Jesus this week? Would you tell him that you love his milk, but you're ready for meat? Specifically, you might spend one hour and read Hebrews through out loud. You might spend a half-day in God's creation asking Jesus to show you evidences that he's the one who created and sustains it all. You might commit to a new small group or mission/ministry team in Jesus' name. You might choose a new book that will challenge or deepen your faith.

It would be so sad if you're no more grown up in August than you are now. Not sad for me, not even sad for Jesus. His emotions don't rise and fall based on your response to him. He's seated at the right hand of God, and he's done everything necessary for you to see God's voice. It would be sad for you if you don't seize this moment and this challenge to find and chew and digest some more solid food. Amen.