

# Isaiah 46-47 • “To whom will you liken me?”

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Isaiah chapter 46, there we go. We've been in the middle of some prophecies that God gave to Isaiah concerning the distant future, particularly as it relates to Israel in the next couple hundred years, 150 to 200 years. Last week, you'll remember that the Lord even named, by name, the pagan Persian king that He would use.

He even called him His anointed who He would use to set the Israelites free from their 70 year exile in the Babylonian kingdom. Of course, that man is Cyrus and the Lord mentioned him and about 150 years before he was born and about 200 years before he would actually set them free to return to their homeland.

In these chapters that we're going to be looking at here this evening, God is going to continue to speak about Babylon, but I want to remind you of something. When Isaiah was getting these prophecies around 700 B. C., Babylon was not yet a world power as we've said in the past, Assyria was still the world power.

Babylon had yet to conquer Assyria and yet God is going to speak in these chapters through Isaiah of the fall of Babylon. He's going to go beyond Babylon coming to power and He's going to begin to speak of Babylon's judgment from the Lord. Because, of course, even though Babylon was used as an instrument of the Lord to spank Israel and to bring disciplinary action upon them, there was governmental overreach.

Boy, we don't know nothing about that, do we? And they went beyond, they went beyond what they were supposed to do and so God brought judgment. They were more cruel more heartless and they did things that was never in the heart of the Lord to do and so God would bring judgment.

But Isaiah is speaking of this before it takes place and of course that's a key element to all prophecy. So let's get into it, let's pray.

Father God, open our hearts to the ministry of your Word. We pray, Father, that you would use this study tonight, in these 2 chapters of Isaiah, to deepen our understanding of your character, your purposes as you work them out among mankind.

We pray, Father, that you would also help us to apply the Word in our lives and then walk it out, so that we can walk in wisdom and stability and strength. We thank you, Father, for giving us this time together and we pray that you would minister in Jesus name, amen.

Isaiah 46 begins this way in verse 1. *“Bel bows down; Nebo stoops; ...” (ESV)* Now, just so you know, Bel and Nebo are two of the more prominent names of the Babylonian pagan deities and that's why you'll notice that a lot of the kings took their names from these gods, that was very common. For example Belshazzar, right? And even Nebuchadnezzar comes from a shortened form from the beginning of Nebo. So, anyway, that was a very common sort of a thing.

He says here, *“...their idols are on beasts and livestock; these things you carry are borne as burdens on weary beasts.<sup>2</sup> They stoop; they bow down together; they cannot save the burden, but themselves go into captivity.”* Let me read another couple of verses and we'll talk about what these mean.

*“Listen to me, O house of Jacob, all the remnant of the house of Israel, who have been borne by me from before your birth, carried from the womb;<sup>4</sup> even to your old age I am he, and to gray hairs I will carry you. I have made, and I will bear; I will carry and will save.”*

Oh, these are beautiful verses, but the Lord begins to speak here through Isaiah concerning the fall of Babylon, and again, He speaks and kind of gives this picture of Babylon being now carried off by the Medo-Persian. You remember, it's the Medo-Persian army that conquered Babylon.

Of course, that hasn't happened yet, when Isaiah is writing about this. But He's already writing about Babylon being taken captive and their gods being carried off. And He talks about how Bel and Nebo are on beasts of burden, and they're being carried, where? We don't know, but off into captivity, according to what he is saying here. And He kind of gives this picture of these gods of Babylon being carried, okay? Now, the reason He's painting that picture for you and I is because of what He goes on to say and that is that, it brings a contrast in verses 3 and 4 to the fact that He is carrying and always has carried His people, right?

He says, the beasts of burden have to carry these gods of Babylon, but I carry you and so that's kind of what God is saying here. He's saying, I carry you from the womb, that means I brought you forth. I continue to carry you and I will continue to carry you, even to your old age and gray hair. I will carry and He says this, and I will save, I will carry and I will save.

So you have these interesting pictures of gods being carried and God carrying. By the way, if you have to carry your god, you need a new God, that kind of probably goes without saying, Your God ought to carry you, does your God carry you?

Does He lift you up? Does He lift you up in times of need? Or do you have to lift him up? Hopefully that's not the case, maybe you're worshiping the wrong God. You remember what David said? I know you do, from Psalm chapter 3 on the screen, let me show you this. David said,

**Psalm 3:3 (ESV)**

*...you, O LORD, are a shield about me, my glory, and the lifter of my head.*

*...you, O LORD, are a shield about me, my glory, (and look at this) and the lifter of my head.*

Some of you have a song going through your mind, it's beautiful, where David says, “you lift me up, you lift me up, Lord, I don't have to lift you up.” So if you're down, and if you need to be carried, just know that you have a God who carries. He carries people and that's a beautiful reality.

Next, God asks a very important question that we've heard Him ask in previous chapters. He says, <sup>5</sup>“*To whom will you liken me and make me equal, and compare me, that we may be alike?*””

Guys, this one single verse in Isaiah stands on its own as a question that frankly is more than just of the rhetorical variety, it really kind of needs an answer. Who will you compare me to? And the reason it kind of needs an answer is because it seems that some people just seem bent on bringing or limiting God, I should say, to analogies that are consistent with their own human experience. Have you ever noticed that?

Because we know what it is to be human, we tend to convey those sorts of understandings of life to God and we think of Him in terms of human limitations sometimes and we project those. I mean, I've told you guys this dozens of times over the years, but one of my first run ins with a Jehovah's

Witness was, a guy standing on my doorstep trying to explain the nature of God by using an example of him and his son, who he happened to be standing with on my porch at that time.

And he was telling me, this is my son, I am his father, I am the father, he is the son, we're not one in the same. And he was trying to use that analogy to just explain God's nature, how Jesus and God the Father can't be one. And I'm like..., and I was pretty new in the Lord back then and I didn't really, I didn't have a fast comeback.

But in later years, I began to kind of realize, wait a minute, why do we do that? Why do we use human analogies to try to describe God? Because if you're going to..., this is where you get dumb questions like, if God is our Father, then who's our mother? Or dumb stuff like that.

God says here, *"To whom will you liken me,"* to what will you liken me? Who you going to compare me to? See, that's more than just a rhetorical question. Who you going to compare me to? I want an answer, who will you compare me to? Should we compare Him to the biggest, toughest, most powerful angel? We don't even know who that is. We only have a couple of names, is it Michael?

Do we compare him with Michael? No, because Michael, as powerful as he is, and he is a powerful dude. We know that from the Book of Revelation, that he will single-handedly bind Satan with a chain and cast him into the abyss for a thousand years. Michael will do that, but he's still a created being.

Michael, as powerful as he is, and any other angels, are still created beings. God is uncreated. You can't compare, you can't say, okay, you start with the single cell amoeba and you work your way up, to the human being, and then you get to the angelic being, and then you have God. No, no, that's not right.

You start with the single cell or whatever it is, you work your way up to the biggest, toughest, most glorious angel and then you've got infinity before you reach God. There's infinity, there's this gap.

So God says to whom will you compare me? Who are you going to point to and say God is just like that? So, it's important that we hear what God is asking here when He asks this question because God is completely other from what we know and understand, okay. God is completely other. Now, you and I got an incredible boost to our understanding when God condescended to become a man in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ. What a glorious thing that was.

God became relatable to us in ways that we couldn't even begin to understand. Now, God is one with the human race in the person of Jesus and is a whole lot more relatable to us, but still God, and that's a mystery, isn't it? Some people will write me and ask questions sometimes about the incarnation and they want me to explain it to them and I can't, I don't even try.

Explain to me the incarnation, how Jesus can be fully God and fully man. It's a mystery, that's why we call it the Mystery of the Incarnation, it's a mystery. We can't figure it out, any more than we can figure out how He is one God in three persons. I mean, who would make that up? Why would you make up something that you can't even explain? So very important question that God asks here.

Now look with me at verses 6 and 7. He says, *“Those who lavish gold from the purse, and weigh out silver in the scales, hire a goldsmith, and he makes it into a god; then they fall down and worship! <sup>7</sup> They lift it to their shoulders, they carry it, they set it in its place, and it stands there; it cannot move from its place. If one cries to it, it does not answer or save him from his trouble.”*

And what the Lord is doing is He's continuing here like He's done in past chapters to show the absolute ridiculousness of comparing the eternal God to gods of gold and silver, gods that have to be made and then have to be carried. And they have to be set in place and gods that don't respond. And I said that on purpose because God says it here.

He says they can't, first of all, they can't move, but second of all, did you notice He said it there at the end of verse 7? If you cry to one of those pagan gods, they don't answer, they can't answer and they won't be able to save you from your trouble.

Christians, do you know that there are many believers who treat God like He's a dumb idol? And they assume that they're not going to get an answer. When they ask, they assume they're probably not going to get an answer. God doesn't speak to me, I don't know, maybe I'm different.

People will say, everybody's always saying the Lord spoke and told to me. I didn't..., the Lord's never done that to me, He's never spoken to me. They probably don't expect Him to for one thing. But I think a lot of people treat God like He's not somebody you can ask, someone you can pose a question to. Have you ever thought that through? When some people write me and ask me questions, I always want to say, well, why don't you ask God? He's a lot smarter, talk to Him. Don't approach Him like a dumb idol, approach Him like a

person. He's a person, God is a person. You can talk to Him and He will speak to you.

You may need to learn to listen for His voice. You may need to cultivate a discernment for His voice, but that doesn't mean He's not speaking. In fact, and frankly, I think God is speaking a whole lot more than we're listening because God specifically says right here about these pagan gods, they do not answer and He wants you to contrast that with Himself.

Verse 8 goes on, He says, *“Remember this and stand firm, recall it to mind, you transgressors, <sup>9</sup> remember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, <sup>10</sup> declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose,’ <sup>11</sup> calling a bird of prey from the east, (He’s talking about Cyrus now again) the man of my counsel from a far country. I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass; I have purposed, and I will do it.”*

But did you notice God begins this section by saying, *“Remember this,”* remember the former things, recall them to your mind. What's He talking about? He's talking about the things the Lord has done and the things the Lord has said.

Because the Lord has said many things that are prophetic; foretelling the future, and He says, I want you to recall it. And now He's bringing up this issue again about Cyrus and saying, I want you to recall. You got to remember that these verses, these Scriptures are going to be read, these are going to be read by the Israelites later on, many years later. While they're in captivity, they're going to read about king Cyrus.

Can you imagine what it would have been like to be an Israelite living in the Persian kingdom when Cyrus came to power? And then you read in Isaiah, his name that was written like 200 years before and it says, all the things that God is going to have him do to bless the nation of Israel.

Can you imagine what it would have been like? To think I'm living in this time when God is carrying out the fulfillment of this prophecy. But now He's encouraging, He's challenging His people to call these things to mind. And He says, I am going to do it because I'm the one who is able to declare the end from the beginning.

And then finally, in this chapter, He says in verse 12. *“Listen to me, you stubborn of heart, you who are far from righteousness: <sup>13</sup> I bring near my*

*righteousness; it is not far off, and my salvation will not delay; I will put salvation in Zion, for Israel my glory.”*

And these are great verses, these last 2, I think, to heed in our own challenging times today. We're living in times that are challenging, not unlike the times that the Israelites were living in at that time, but different challenges, of course, but challenging nonetheless. And the Lord is saying here that I am going to do it, I've got a plan and I'm going to carry it out and I'm not going to delay.

And I believe that the same is true today, I believe God has a plan. I think He's working today, I think He's going to carry out His plan and I think His plan includes deliverance because I think that's what His plan is. I think if He has a filing system, He files it under deliverance and He's going to carry it out.

God is going to carry out His plan. I mean, you and I, we get all keyed to things happening in the world. And I'll confess to you something, I've in years past and I've made a determination not to do this again. But in years past, I've put a lot of stock in how like the election goes because usually one of the presidents that is up for election, has some values that are a little bit closer to what we believe the Bible, ought to have for us and so forth.

And then there's usually one candidate who is a long way away from that. And so when we find a candidate who gets elected that isn't the one we wanted, we tend to kind of go, oh... We can get down in the dumps but we forget that God has a plan. And His plan includes things that we might otherwise look at and kind of go, no, not that. But God's plan is going to be carried out and nothing is going to thwart it, nothing is going to thwart it.

And so I think these are good verses, especially where God says, listen to me, listen to me. Particularly those of you who are stubborn of heart and I can be stubborn of heart sometimes. Even though God tells me to trust in Him, I put my..., I'm just telling, I'm just confessing from the past, I've put my stock in how elections went and I'm like, okay, no more of that, but I've done it. And so God's just saying, hey, I have a plan, I have a plan.

All right, chapter 47 of Isaiah. These are not terribly long chapters at all but God speaks here in verse 1 and He says, *“Come down and sit in the dust, O virgin daughter of Babylon; sit on the ground without a throne, O daughter of the Chaldeans! For you shall no more be called tender and delicate.”* And again, I want to remind you God is speaking of judgment for the Babylonian Empire before it has even taken its center stage in the world as a superpower. So He's speaking about these things before they happen.

He says in verse 2, *“Take the millstones and grind flour, put off your veil, strip off your robe, uncover your legs, (which people would have to do back then in order to move quickly and easily when they were working) pass through the rivers.”*

So God is speaking here about hard labor, He's talking to the Babylonians. See, as the world power, they're going to have things kind of easy. Because they're going to conquer many kingdoms and they're going to bring those kingdoms to Babylon and they're going to use these people to work and do labor and this and that.

And God is basically saying that's all going to come to an end so strip off your robes, strip off your decorative clothing and get busy because you're going to have to do your own hard work again. Grab the millstone, you're going to be grinding out your own grain, right?

And that's why He said earlier there at the end of verse 1, *“you shall no more be called tender and delicate.”* Because you're going to be working hard now from here on out.

Verse 3, *“Your nakedness shall be uncovered, and your disgrace shall be seen. I will take vengeance, and I will spare no one.”* Now, that phrase, *“Your nakedness will be uncovered,”* is a euphemism, it's not to be taken literally. It is a euphemism for the exposing of that which is otherwise disgraceful to look at, okay.

So God is basically saying that He's going to pull back the covers as it were and expose the things that were going on in Babylon that were sinful and make them liable for judgment. And He says, I'm going to expose... and God does that, He exposes things and that's a good thing sometimes for us to pray. Lord expose what's really going on here, expose the truth of the situation. Can be pretty, pretty shocking when He does.

He goes on now in verses 4 through 6 and He says, *“Our Redeemer—the LORD of hosts is his name—is the Holy One of Israel. Sit in silence, and go into darkness, O daughter of the Chaldeans; for you shall no more be called the mistress of kingdoms. <sup>6</sup> I was angry with my people; I profaned my heritage; (and look at this) I gave them into your hand; (speaking of, they're being able to conquer Israel, but look what it goes on to say. Here's God's indictment against Babylon) you showed them no mercy; on the aged you made your yoke exceedingly heavy.”*



So when the Babylonians conquered, Israel, or specifically Jerusalem and Judah, they were even cruel to elderly people and made them work hard and carry hard burdens and the Lord is now calling them to task for that.

He says in verse 7, *“You said, ‘I shall be mistress forever,’ (in other words, I’ll have this position of authority and power forever) so that you did not lay these things to heart or remember their end.”*

That's a very important verse right there, because what God is charging the Babylonians with, is not considering the fact that Israel was being judged for her sins. He's basically saying, you didn't stop to think about the fact that I was bringing judgment upon my nation Israel, instead of respecting that judgment, you took advantage of it.

You were cruel in the way you treated my people, you were horrible and you should have remembered that I judge all sin and I'm an impartial judge. And if you go overboard, I'm going to judge you too. But you didn't do that, you didn't remember, you didn't take these things into consideration.

So He goes on and He says, *“Now therefore hear this, you lover of pleasures, who sit securely, who say in your heart, ‘I am, and there is no one besides me; I shall not sit as a widow or know the loss of children’”:*

But look at what God says, *“<sup>9</sup> These two things shall come to you in a moment, in one day; the loss of children and widowhood shall come upon you in full measure, in spite of your many sorceries and the great power of your enchantments. You felt secure in your wickedness; you said, ‘No one sees me’; your wisdom and your knowledge led you astray, and you said in your heart, ‘I am, and there is no one besides me.’”*

Do you see how God is exposing the incredible level of arrogance and deception that had made its way into the Babylonian Empire? And it characterized the Babylonians to the degree that they became self-deceived. They thought of themselves as, immovable and they said, no one sees us, we can do whatever we want and there's no one to hold us accountable. And they even used a name that only God used for Himself. They said, , *“I am, and there is no”* other. Now only God can say that. So they forgot, they forgot.

God gave Babylon power and success. You know that, right? It's God who gave Babylon their power. It's God who gave Babylon their success, but they forgot that. They forgot that God gives power and success and we do good not to forget that too.

God gives it to individuals and God gives it to nations and individuals and nations ought not forget that it is God who gives it, right? But you might be thinking to yourself, now wait a minute here, pastor Paul, God seems to be confronting Babylon by saying, you should know these things but should they?

I mean, they're pagans, God hadn't revealed Himself to Babylon like He had to Israel, so why is God holding them accountable for being able to look at these kind of situations and to say, we need to take this into consideration.

I mean, were they ever told? Were they ever told that there is one God who rules all? Well, yeah, kind of, their king Nebuchadnezzar was told. I don't know if you guys remember reading through the Book of Daniel?

I just actually went through it in my own study here just recently in the last few weeks but in Daniel chapter 4 there's an interesting story that tells us how God humbled king Nebuchadnezzar.

You remember, early on in the Book of Daniel, God showed Nebuchadnezzar the kingdoms of man, the Gentile kingdoms of man, and he depicted it as a statue, do you remember? And the statue had a golden head and then it had silver and metals of decreasing value as the statue went down.

And God said to Nebuchadnezzar, you are the head of gold and you might remember that instead of being humbled by that and saying the Lord has given me everything that I have, Nebuchadnezzar made a statue in his own honor and demanded that people worship it. The guy was incredible, I mean, he was a piece of work and then later on, God challenged Nebuchadnezzar, but he wouldn't listen.

And the Bible tells us that one day he was out on his porch kind of looking over the kingdom of Babylon, and he said, look what I've done, look what I've made. And the Lord struck him and took away his humanity and he became like an animal.

And he had been told ahead of time that this was going to happen. He'd been told in a dream, do you remember that? And he had that dream interpreted and he still didn't listen. Let me put on the screen for you Daniel chapter 4, let me show you this. This is the interpretation being given to him.

**Daniel 4:24-25 (ESV)**

*this is the interpretation, O king: It is a decree of the Most High, which has come upon my lord the king, that you shall be driven from among men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field. You shall be made to eat grass like an ox, and you shall be wet with the dew of heaven, and seven periods of time shall pass over you, till you know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will.*

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And it happened just like that. Although he heard the interpretation of this, he didn't take it to heart. And it was after he heard this, that he's out on his balcony going, I am the great Nebuchadnezzar and this kingdom that I have created. And then, boom! So he, for seven years, for seven years, he crawled around like an animal.

God literally took away his, human sensibility. But at the end of that time, let me show you this also.

**Daniel 4:34-35 (ESV)**

*At the end of the days I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High, and praised and honored him who lives forever, for his dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom endures from generation to generation; all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, and he does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand or say to him, "What have you done?"*

*At the end of the days I, Nebuchadnezzar, (and he's writing this himself) lifted my eyes to heaven, and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High, (notice that reference) and praised and honored him who lives forever, for his (here's a good word) dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom endures from generation to generation; all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, and he does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand or say to him, "What have you done?"*

And that's a fancy way of saying He's sovereign, that last line. So their king did have this revealed, why wasn't that passed along to his subjects? Why wasn't that passed along to his people? Actually, you know what? He put this in a decree, he actually wrote this and put it in a decree to his people. But did they listen? Did they listen to their king?

They didn't, because now God is speaking through Isaiah and He's telling them how He's going to judge them for all of their sins and for thinking that it is all them. That they were the power, they were the glory of their kingdom. God is saying, I'm going to take it all away from you because I'm the one who gives it and I'm the one who takes it away.

Back to Isaiah chapter 47, look at verse 11. Let's read through the end of the chapter here and then we'll talk about it. It says, *"But evil shall come upon you, which you will not know how to charm away; disaster shall fall upon you, for which you will not be able to atone; and ruin shall come upon you suddenly, of which you know nothing."*

<sup>12</sup> *Stand fast in your enchantments and your many sorceries, with which you have labored from your youth; perhaps you may be able to succeed; perhaps you may inspire terror. (do you hear sarcasm)* <sup>13</sup> *You are wearied with your many counsels; let them stand forth and save you, those who divide the heavens, who gaze at the stars, who at the new moons make known what shall come upon you.*

<sup>14</sup> *Behold, they are like stubble; the fire consumes them; they cannot deliver themselves from the power of the flame. No coal for warming oneself is this, no fire to sit before!* <sup>15</sup> *Such to you are those with whom you have labored, who have done business with you from your youth; they wander about, each in his own direction; there is no one to save you."*

Wow! What an indictment, what a powerful statement God is making to the Babylonians. But He's talking about this because things like astrology and sorcery were very common in Babylon, but with all their ways of trying to determine the future, none of those things He said, we're going to produce any help for them when the Lord moves to take away their power and their glory.

And you'll notice in these verses, you almost hear the Lord mocking them as He urges them to keep feverishly working on your spells and your sorceries and do your best and try to counter what I'm about to do. The Lord is challenging them in a way as to say, go ahead, if you put your trust in these things, then work hard at it and maybe you can do something. But there's nothing they can do and

He even brings out their stargazers who look at their new moons and tell what's to come.

If you ever gotten into horoscopes? When I was a kid, I used to think horoscopes were kind of cool until I kind of realized that what they said, you could pretty much say to anybody. It's kind of like, horoscopes create this really big dartboard and pretty much every dart's going to hit, pretty close to you know. It's dumb the things that we..., but those are the kind of things that the Babylonians put their stock in.

So God says your stargazers are useless to you because you know what? They couldn't foretell what I was about to do. So if they couldn't tell you about this disaster that I'm going to bring, I would say, they're not worth a whole lot, are they? Nor are they going to be able to stop it.

And once again, I want to remind you that these words are going to be read by the Jews in captivity in a couple of hundred years, or even somewhat less than that. The Lord is going to allow them to be able to read the words of Isaiah during their captivity and they would read these prophecies and they would read about the things that the Lord was going to do.

And they would remember that it is God who brings judgment on all nations. And they will remember that He brought judgment on them, allowing them to be conquered by Babylon and He will then turn and judge the Babylonians. And He will remind them with these words that they must never look to anyone else for deliverance, but only to the Lord.

Never give in to the useless methods of the Babylonians. And I kind of think about that and I think that same word could just as easily be directed today at the body of Christ. Because we're living in a world that is very much like Babylon in that sense of coming up with all kinds of ways to kind of impress people and deliver

But Jesus is our deliverer, He is our deliverer, He is the one that we are to look to and we are to look to no other. We're not to look to this world, we're not to look to the world's methodologies and answers to get things done. If you've got issues going on in your life and who doesn't, I mean, if you don't, wow. But when you have issues going on in your life, don't turn to the world, don't turn to their solutions. If you got money problems, don't turn to the world's solutions, go to God, He's your deliverer.

He's the one who's going to give you wisdom and know how to act. You got marriage problems? You got relationship issues? Go to the Lord, go to God. He's got answers, His Word is powerful, His wisdom is unmatched and the world's got nothing on Him. And whatever else might be going on in your life, go to the Lord.

Don't go to the world because the ways of the world are going to be judged. The methods of the world are going to be judged. Just as you hear the Lord going through and talking to the Babylonians about their methodologies, their ways of dealing with life, their ways of seeking deliverance.

Just as you hear God calling to them and saying, they're useless, they're stubble, they can't help you, they can't save. He speaks just as passionately to the body of Christ about the ways of the world. And He says, they're stubble, they're useless, they cannot save, and they absolutely cannot satisfy, only I can satisfy.

That deep longing in your heart for answers, for peace, for joy, you're not going to find it in the halls of the world or in the wisdom of the world. God has made foolish the wisdom of man.