



TEST NO.7: THE WISDOM TEST

Ask people if they'd like to be remembered as a wise person or an idiot, and I reckon most would opt for the former. But in the Bible, to be smart you've got to know what wisdom looks like – and if the history of human mistakes is anything to go by, that is not as easy as it sounds! And the consequences – for us, for others, for our world, and for our witness – could be colossal.

Which is why Jacob or James, the half-brother of Jesus, makes this – the wisdom test – the 7th test of true faith:

James 3:13-18

Here are some fascinating facts I got off the Guinness World Record website just the other day. Did you know:

- The longest fingernails on a single hand belonged to a certain Shridhar Chillal of Pune City, India, whose nails (on his left hand) measured 909.6 cm / 358.1 in.
- The highest ever bungee-jump took place on 17th December 2006, when New Zealander AJ Hackett leapt from China's Macau Tower – a height of 199 m / 652 ft.
- The longest kiss was achieved on 14th February 2013 by a Thai couple, Ekkachai Tiranarat and Laksana Tiranarat: it lasted 58 hours, 35 minutes, 58 seconds.

- The most *Bhut Jolokia* Ghost Chillis eaten in 1 minute is a sweat-inducing 10 (at 1 million Scoville Units per chilli), by Canadian Mike Jack, on 2nd March 2019.
- The longest anything has survived without its head is a staggering 18 months. The animal – a Colorado chicken named Mike – even went on tour, in 1945.

Now fascinating though those records might be, they're probably not going to change the way you live your life. Because what you're looking at there is knowledge, not wisdom. And you can have a whole head full of this stuff, be a world-renowned quiz-night champion, and still be unwise.

So, what is wisdom? According to James, it's something that's got to show (vs13). But then he tells us there are 2 kinds. There's ...

1) A Wisdom From Below (vs14-16). What kind of wisdom is this? A false wisdom; a fallen, human-definition of wisdom. It looks like this:

- **Envious.** Always wanting what others have got – possessions, positions, popularity – rather than being content with what you have. I.e. a covetous attitude.
- **Ambitious.** Nothing wrong with having an aim in life. But James here is talking an ambition that's all about my wants, what I want to do, at the expense of anyone else.
- **Boastful.** An attitude that says, "Look at what I can do; look at what I've achieved. Look at *me*." A proud, arrogant heart that says, "I don't need God in my life."
- **Dishonest.** Not just speaking lies, but living them. In particular, living in denial of what God has revealed to us – about Himself, about the world, and about us.
- **Earthly.** What we might call 'materialism' today. A focus on the things of this world as if that is the key to happiness and personal wellbeing (it isn't, by the way).
- **Unspiritual.** What we might call 'scientific naturalism', a denial of the divine. An attitude that wants to remove God from the picture (a bit like the Jefferson Bible!).
- **Satanic.** Or rebellious. Interestingly, every quality listed here applies to Satan, too. If you want to know what Satan sounds like, listen to what the world sounds like!

And the results of this kind of wisdom? "Disorder and every evil practice," James says here. As Fyodor Dostoevsky argues in *Crime & Punishment*: "If God does not exist, then everything is permitted." And that includes the fallout – in our relationships, in our world.

That's false wisdom. But then James introduces us to a second candidate ...

2) A Wisdom From Above (vs17-18). What kind of wisdom is this? A true, *bona fide* wisdom; a God-definition of wisdom. It looks like this:

- **Pure.** The Bible tells us that God is both supremely wise, and morally unblemished. And if we are His kids and His Spirit is in us, those qualities should show in us, too.
- **Peaceable.** Or harmonious (think *shalom!*). In a hectic world it can be easy to get angry with situations or people, but true wisdom is marked by a longing for peace.
- **Considerate.** Being mindful of what others need and what others are feeling – not just us. Human wisdom is naturally self-centred. God’s wisdom is not.
- **Submissive.** Not being a doormat or a punchbag, but recognising that God is in charge, that He is sovereign, and living to serve His will – and others in the process.
- **Merciful.** Showing understanding to others, as Jesus does; not looking to hold things against people when they get it wrong (which they will – because we all do).
- **Impartial.** As in treating all people in the same way – with love and respect. Because there’s no room for racism or ageism or sexism in the Kingdom of God.
- **Sincere.** Or ‘without pretence.’ In the ancient world, if a pot came out cracked the damage could be hidden with wax. A waxless pot was said to be ‘without pretence.’

The results of this kind of wisdom? A life of right choices. Not easy ones necessarily, but right. Because wisdom shows! As the Maoris say about the sweet potato: “The *kumara* does not need to say how sweet it is.” The same is true of wisdom.

The Score

The human race is more knowledgeable now than ever. Unbelievably so, in fact. But wiser? Well, that’s another story. Because as I said earlier, knowledge and wisdom are not the same thing. Now that doesn’t mean that knowledge is unimportant (the Bible encourages learning, after all). It just means that God is more interested in what you *do* with it.

So, how are we to gain such wisdom? What’s interesting about this passage is that it’s mostly descriptive, rather than prescriptive – which may be a clue in itself. Because true wisdom comes from a relationship with the One who is the source of it (Psalm 111:10), the One who became wisdom, in-the-flesh (1 Corinthians 1:30). It all begins there.

And now, some (I hope, wise) questions!

- Which wisdom – true or false – best describes you?
- Who do you know who exemplifies genuine wisdom?
- What 3 steps could you take to become wiser, today?