

Praise for *The Bard and the Bible*

“Filled with wonderful insights. *The Bard and the Bible* is a concise, well-written introduction to two timeless classics that have shaped our culture—the works of William Shakespeare and the King James Bible. Readers, young and old, are sure to enjoy this fun and informative work.”

—**Devin Brown**, professor of English, Asbury University, and author of *A Life Observed: A Spiritual Biography of C. S. Lewis*

“When American pioneers headed west in their covered wagons, the two standard books that they brought with them were the King James Bible and the works of Shakespeare. Bob Hostetler’s devotional book *The Bard and the Bible* brings those same two books together. The most notable feature of *The Bard and the Bible* is the wide range of material it encompasses in compact form. This book has something for everyone. Each entry is anchored in three elements—a passage from the writings of Shakespeare, a passage from the King James Bible, and a devotional meditation from the author. Then there is a concluding section of interesting information about Shakespeare or words or history and many other interesting facts. In its own unobtrusive way, this book is a triumph of research.”

—**Leland Ryken**, professor of English at Wheaton College, King James Bible and Shakespeare enthusiast and author

“The King James Bible is the offspring of a theatrical age, as are the works of William Shakespeare. *The Bard and the Bible* brings these two great English monuments together context for context in one deliciously crafted little book, a devotional that informs as well as it entices. It is the highness, the royal step, and the deep inward gaze of both the King James Bible and the works of Shakespeare that *The Bard and the Bible* so eloquently reminds us of. This book is a tribute to the richness of our English language. Bob Hostetler has done a very cool thing.”

—**David Teems**, author of *Majestie: The King Behind the King James Bible* and *Tyndale: The Man Who Gave God an English Voice*.

“What a great idea for a book! Bob Hostetler’s Shakespeare devotional is a fun and breezy read that extracts truth and wit from both the King James Bible and the plays of Shakespeare. The resulting combination is sure to teach and delight even as it challenges and convicts.”

—**Louis Markos**, professor in English and Scholar in Residence,
Houston Baptist University

“Bob Hostetler and I have spent many an evening talking about writers, books, and literary themes. If anyone has an ear for Shakespeare’s wit, wisdom, and marvelous elements of irony, it’s Bob. This, combined with his pastor’s heart, enables him to create a volume of devotions both encouraging and entertaining. Read, learn, and enjoy!”

—**Dennis E. Hensley**, Ph.D., Chairman, Dept. of Professional Writing,
Taylor University

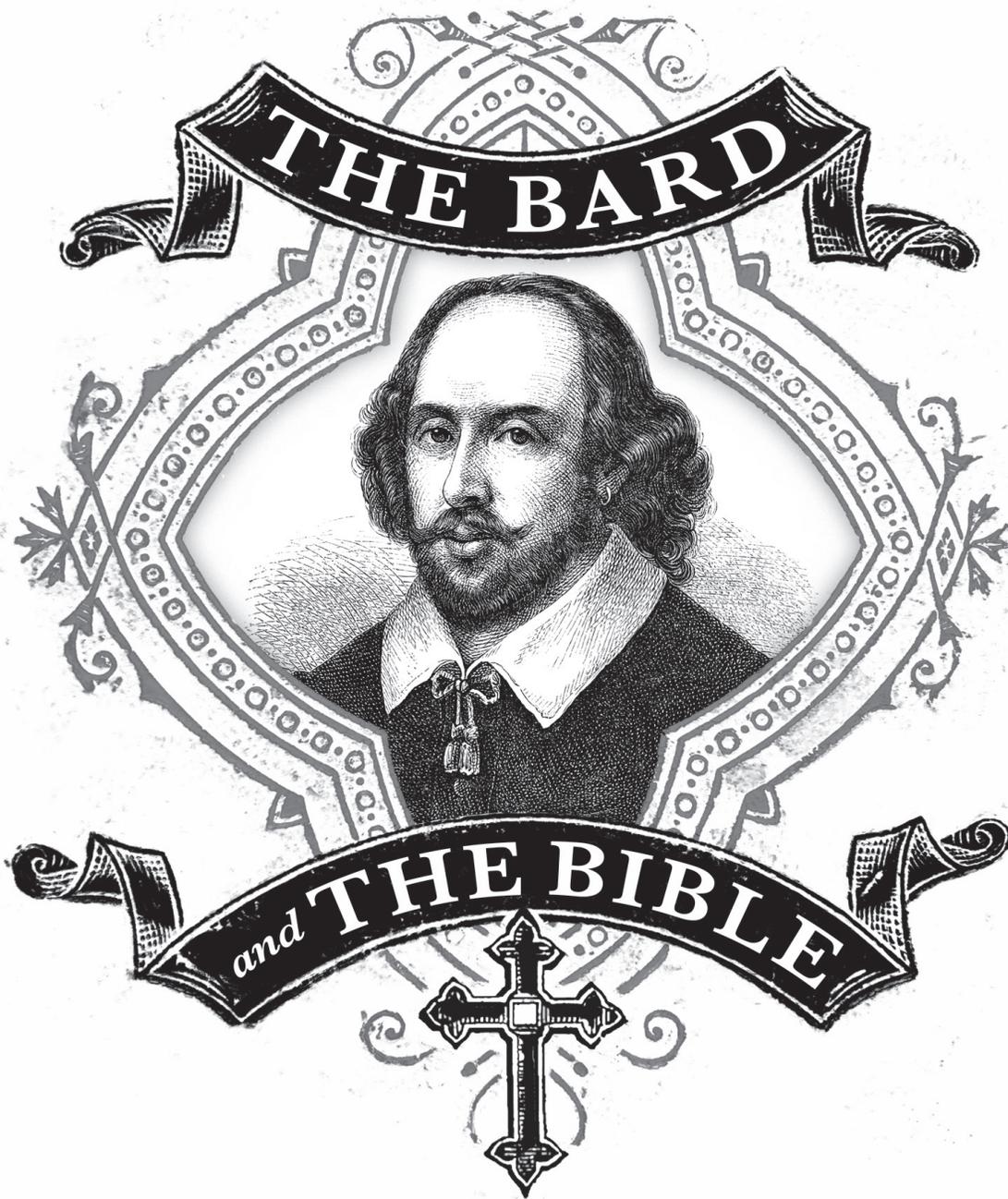
“As a lover of both Shakespeare’s writings and God’s Holy Word, I find *The Bard and the Bible* a delightful comparison of works. While Shakespeare’s words were conceived by man and penned by ink in the Elizabethan era, God’s words were conceived before time began and dictated to His chosen scribes according to His plan. Yet, when I read the excerpts side-by-side, the consequential pattern is clearly evident. The Bard’s stories and parables artistically forge a glimpse of spiritual truth for you and me today.”

—**Vonda Skelton**, author and speaker,
founder of Christian Communicators Speaker Training

“Shakespeare and the King James Bible—what could be a better combination? *The Bard and the Bible* blends the most influential works in the English language in ways that will challenge and inspire readers. Through quotes, short devotional reflections, and a sprinkling of fascinating background information, Bob Hostettler offers readers a thoroughly enjoyable devotional.”

—**Joseph Bentz**, author of *Nothing is Wasted:
How God Redeems What is Broken*

BOB HOSTETLER



A Shakespeare Devotional


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HELPING PEOPLE EXPERIENCE THE HEART OF GOD

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TO THE LOVELY ROBIN,
WHO SHARES MY LOVE FOR THE BIBLE
AND SUPPORTS MY LOVE OF SHAKESPEARE



INTRODUCTION



When I began college studies in English literature at a small liberal arts college, one of my first courses was a freshman course in Shakespeare's plays. In the first weeks of classes, I marveled at the struggles of the other students in my class. To them, *Romeo and Juliet* seemed to speak a different language. *Julius Caesar* may as well have been delivering his lines in his native Latin. Hamlet's "words, words, words" made little sense to them.

Then it dawned on me. I grew up with King James.

Not the man who was king of England, Ireland, and Scotland, of course. After all, he lived from 1566–1625, which was a bit before my time. And not the professional basketball player, LeBron James, whose play earned him the title "King James."

When I say I grew up with King James, I mean I grew up with the translation of the Bible that has, since its initial publication, inspired and transformed countless lives with its soaring poetry, stirring plots, and sweet promises. The King James Version of the Bible, begun in 1604 and completed in 1611, has ever since been recognized and revered as both literary masterpiece and sacred text.

Like so many people of my generation—and earlier—my earliest and fondest memories resound with its lyrical phrases:

"The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want" (Psalm 23:1).

"Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God" (Ruth 1:16).

"He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty" (Psalm 91:1).

"Ye are the salt of the earth" (Matthew 5:13).

"And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity" (1 Corinthians 13:13).

Many of the songs and prayers of my childhood echo lines from the King James Version: “I Know Whom I Have Believed,” “In Thee, O Lord, Do I Put My Trust,” “It’s No Longer I That Liveth,” “The Lord Watch Between Me and Thee,” etc. The King James Version was my mother’s Bible, which I still treasure. It was the Bible from which I prepared my first Sunday school lesson and preached my first sermon (both of which are long forgotten, thankfully). It was the first Bible my wife bought as a gift for me.

So when I encountered Shakespeare’s poetry and plays in that college classroom, I enjoyed an advantage that my fellow students lacked. My vocabulary included the “thees” and “thous” and “whosoever’s” of Elizabethan English and the extraordinary cadences of the King James Version’s poetry and prose, so Shakespeare’s language posed no barrier to understanding for me. But my classroom peers were as lost as Alonso in *The Tempest*.

That was the first time I experienced the similarities between those two towering works of art produced in the same period. The Bible, of course, is rightly revered as sacred literature, while Shakespeare’s works are often irreverent and downright bawdy, so there are certainly great differences between them—but whether or not Shakespeare is quoting scripture (which he did more than any other Elizabethan poet or playwright), the Bard and the Bible bear striking similarities not only of language but also of theme and purpose. Anyone who is familiar with one will hear echoes of it in the other.

Thus, when the boy in Henry V moans, “I would give all my fame for a pot of ale and safety,” the story of Esau, “who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright,” may spring to mind (Hebrews 12:16). Or Hamlet urging repentance on his adulterous mother—saying, “For use almost can change the stamp of nature, and either [master] the devil, or throw him out, with wondrous potency”—may recall the words of James to “Resist the devil, and he will flee from you” (James 4:7). And when Portia, in *The Merchant of Venice*, says, “How far that little candle throws his beams! So shines a good deed in a naughty world,” who can fail to remember Jesus’ command to “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 5:16)? But there is more than such curious and striking similarities in this Shakespeare devotional; these daily doses of inspiration and insight from

two masterpieces of literature are intended to “cheer your heart,” “awake your senses,” and stay with you day by day, leading to surprising new applications and realizations in your life.

With a few exceptions (such as the first few readings, Shakespeare’s birthday, and Christmas Day), the quotations from Shakespeare are arranged in the approximate order in which the plays were written (though the order, particularly of the earlier plays, is a subject of debate) and in the order in which they occur in each play. Quotes from Shakespeare’s sonnets and other poems are sometimes inserted between the plays. Each of the daily entries include a short excerpt from Shakespeare, a verse or passage from the King James Version, and a devotional reading based on the quotes, concluding with a question to help the user apply the reading.

All of the daily readings are short. Some emphasize the Shakespeare quote, others the Bible verse, and still others the correspondence or contrast between the two. Each reading is intended to prompt further reflection. Over the course of the year’s readings, many of Shakespeare’s favorite topics, themes, and biblical allusions and verses will become vivid. I hope you’ll find, as I do, that the interplay between the Bard of Avon’s poetry and the King James Version’s truth shines new light on old paths, sometimes exposing new depths and previously unexplored heights.

Whether you read each day’s entry in the morning over a cup of coffee or on your lunch break or in the evening before going to bed, let the phrases, scenes, beauty, and truth of these pages linger in your mind and seep into your heart. Be inspired. Be challenged. Be changed.

A MOMENT TO REMEMBER



For since the birth of Cain, the first male child,
 To him that did but yesterday suspire,
 There was not such a gracious creature born.
King John, III, iv, 79¹

And Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bare Cain.
 Genesis 4:1

No historical records exist of William Shakespeare's birth. His entrance into the world would be a complete mystery if not for a page in the records of Holy Trinity Church in Stratford, England. The faded ink on a yellowed page indicates that the son of John Shakespeare, a leather merchant and glovemaker, was baptized on April 26, 1564. From that single line, scholars infer that the greatest dramatist and poet the English-speaking world has arguably ever known was born on or near April 23, 1564.

William was the third child of the glovemaker and his wife, Mary Arden, a woman from a prominent family (in fact, she married the son of a tenant who farmed land owned by her father). Two sisters—Joan and Margaret—were born before him but died in infancy. His birth was followed by the arrival of five siblings—Gilbert, Joan (apparently named after her deceased sister), Anne, Richard, and Edmund. William's birth would have been an occasion for celebration, but even more so his continued survival in an age when three in ten children died before the age of ten (William's younger sister Anne would later die at eight years old).

We know little else of Shakespeare's birth. We know about as much of the birth of Adam's firstborn, to which Shakespeare would later refer in his play, *The Life and Death of King John*, as we do of John Shakespeare's first son. Such "ordinary" moments—especially in the sixteenth century—often came and went without record or remark. At the time, none could have guessed that it was a moment to be remembered.

How can you make this coming year one to remember?

A PIECE OF SCRIPTURE

- *Shakespeare quoted from or alluded to the Bible more than a thousand times in his plays—more than any other Elizabethan playwright.*
- *Shakespeare was probably most familiar with the Geneva Bible (also called the Puritan Bible), first published in England in 1576 (when Shakespeare was twelve).*
- *Shakespeare alluded to Cain twenty-five times in thirty-eight plays.*

A NEW DAY



Or that I could forget what I have been,
Or not remember what I must be now.

Richard II, III, iii, 138

*Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature:
old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.*

2 Corinthians 5:17

Timing is everything.

It is true in music and cooking, acting and comedy, in hitting a fast-ball or starting a business. And, judging from William Shakespeare's play *The Tragedy of King Richard the Second*, it is true for kings and warriors.

Shakespeare pursued both dramatic and political goals in portraying Richard II (1367–1400) as indecisive and ineffective. He also painted him as painfully self-absorbed. Moody. Vacillating. But most importantly, Richard's timing is shown to have been horrible. If he had returned to England from Ireland just one day earlier, all would have been well. If he had made peace with his rival, Henry Bolingbroke, at the first opportunity, things would have been hunky-dory. If he had truly listened to his advisors before it was too late, everything would have been tickety-boo (that's a Britishism—appropriate, don't you think?). But he was repeatedly too quick to judge, to give up, and to feel sorry for himself, saying, "Oh . . . that I could forget what I have been, or not remember what I must be now." The irony is that he could have done so at many points.

There may be no better time to forget what has been and envision a different future for yourself than at the beginning of a new year. It is an ideal moment to commit your life and future to following Jesus, claiming the promise that "old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17). It is an opportunity to forget what has been and plan for what may yet be.

You began a new year yesterday; how can you make it a great one?

BY TALE OR HISTORY

- *No one knows for sure what plays Shakespeare wrote first, but they may have been Richard III and the three-part Henry VI, which were written in the early 1590s.*
- *Richard II, chronicles the earliest events in the eight historical plays Shakespeare wrote relating events that occurred in fifteenth-century England.*

REDEEM THE TIME



I wasted time, and now doth time waste me.

Richard II, V, v, 49

See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise,

Redeeming the time, because the days are evil.

Ephesians 5:15–16

Richard II became the king of England when he was ten years old. His uncle was really in charge since Richard was so young, but it still had to be great to be king. As if that wasn't enough, as he grew to adulthood, he became a tall, handsome, intelligent man. But—at least as portrayed in Shakespeare's history play *The Tragedy of King Richard the Second*—he didn't quite have it all. He could be capricious and vindictive, traits that eventually led to his downfall and sorrowful abdication to his cousin, Henry Bolingbroke. In Act 5 of the play, Richard—imprisoned in Pomfret Castle—bemoans his lost crown and squandered reign, saying, “I wasted time, and now doth time waste me.”

Paul, the great church planter and letter writer of the first century, told friends in Ephesus to “redeem” time. The word in Greek is *exagorazo* (also used in Galatians 3:13, 4:5, and Colossians 4:5), which means to buy or purchase a commodity. We often speak of *spending* or *saving* time, but Paul said we should *buy* it. What did he mean by that? Probably this: recognize its value, make what sacrifices we must to gain it, and use it wisely and well.

What will be the wisest ways to “buy time” in the days, weeks, and months of this new year to come?

A PIECE OF SCRIPTURE

- *King James I of England, who authorized the translation and publication of a new version of the Bible, was also King James VI of Scotland.*
- *The King James Version is also referred to as the “Authorized Version” (AV), because it was produced with the king’s approval.*
- *The King James Version is the best-selling Bible version of all time.*

DON'T BE A PEST



Unbidden guests

Are often welcomest when they are gone.

Henry VI, Part I, II, ii, 55

*Withdraw thy foot from thy neighbour's house;
lest he be weary of thee, and so hate thee.*

Proverbs 25:17

Henry VI, Part I, one of Shakespeare's earliest plays, begins with the funeral of Henry V, who was succeeded by his young son, Henry VI. The history play depicts the loss of England's territories in France and the growing factions that led to the Wars of the Roses (so named later because the supporters of Richard Plantagenet, Duke of York, came to be identified by a white rose, while a red rose emblazoned the supporters of John Beaufort, Duke of Somerset).

In the play's second act, when Lord Talbot receives an invitation to pay a call on the Countess of Auvergne, he encourages the Duke of Bedford to accompany him. Bedford declines, however, saying, "I have heard it said, unbidden guests / Are often welcomest when they are gone." In other words, he didn't want to crash the countess's party.

A similar sentiment is found among the proverbs of King Solomon, who was renowned for wisdom and wealth: "Withdraw thy foot from thy neighbour's house; lest he be weary of thee, and so hate thee" (Proverbs 25:17). Modern parlance puts the same idea as, "Don't make a nuisance of yourself" or "Don't wear out your welcome."

Could any of your "neighbors" or friends use a little more breathing room?

BY TALE OR HISTORY

- *Some scholars consider Henry VI, Part I to be one of Shakespeare's weaker plays; it is the play most often cut when the Henry VI plays are staged as a whole.*
- *Henry VI, Part I was originally titled The First Part of the Contention Betwixt the Two Famous Houses of York.*