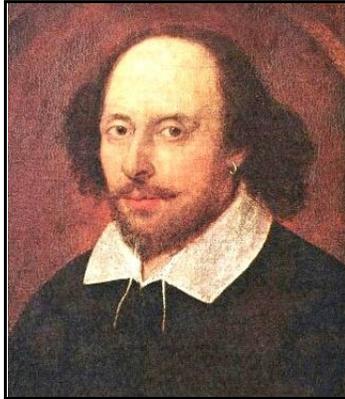


THE MERCHANT OF VENICE

by William Shakespeare



THE AUTHOR

William Shakespeare (1564-1616) was born into the family of a prosperous tradesman in Stratford-upon-Avon, England. While in his mid-teens, he was forced to leave school because his family fell into a period of poverty, so that he had only a rudimentary education. In 1582, he married Anne Hathaway, eight years his senior and already three months pregnant. The marriage produced three children in three years, but in 1585, Shakespeare left Stratford to go to London to seek his fortune in the big city.

In London, he embarked upon a career on the stage, becoming a popular actor by the early fifteen nineties. In 1591, he penned his first play, *Love's Labour's Lost*. His early plays were comedies, and show nothing of the depth that characterized his later works. His plots were borrowed from a variety of sources, both ancient and contemporary. During his career, he wrote 37 plays, three narrative poems, and 154 sonnets.

His writing brought him fame and popularity, but he continued to act as well as write (critics love to speculate about which of the characters in his plays would have been played by the author). He eventually became a shareholder in the Lord Chamberlain's Men (later the King's Men when James I ascended the throne). Most of his plays were performed at local theaters like the Rose, the Globe, and the indoor Blackfriars. When the Globe burned to the ground in 1613 (a cannon misfired during a performance of *Henry VIII*), Shakespeare retired, and died in Stratford three years later on his fifty-second birthday.

The Merchant of Venice was first performed between 1596 and 1598, during the era in which Shakespeare produced his greatest comedies (note that *The Merchant of Venice* qualifies because of its happy ending, not because it is conventionally "funny"). The play contains one of Shakespeare's greatest heroines in Portia, who, like Rosalind in *As You Like It* and Viola in *Twelfth Night*, enacts key scenes disguised as a man (women were not permitted to act on the English stage until the Restoration in 1660, years after Shakespeare's death).

Modern audiences find it difficult to deal with the anti-Semitism implicit in the treatments of the character of Shylock, but several things should be kept in mind here. First of all, Shylock, like

Othello, would have been an exotic to the Elizabethan audience; Jews had been ejected from England in 1290 and were not admitted until the time of Oliver Cromwell in 1655, and therefore would have been unknown, both to Shakespeare and his audience. Secondly, Shylock is a villain because of his practice of usury and use of this practice as an outlet for his greed and hatred - if one thinks "Mafia loan shark" instead of "Jew," one will be close to the mark in terms of how the character was viewed by Shakespeare's audience. Thirdly, we should note that Shakespeare's understanding of Judaism, since he had no direct contact with it, was derived largely from the way the Pharisees are pictured in the New Testament; Shylock's chief characteristic is his fanatical adherence to the letter of the law in violation of its spirit and intent. When Portia uses his own tactics against him in the trial scene, she is doing something Christ Himself did when He was attacked by the Pharisees in the Temple in Jerusalem. Finally, we should note that Shakespeare paints Shylock in very human colors - unlike other villains such as Iago and Goneril, who display not a shred of human feeling.

MAJOR CHARACTERS

- Portia - The heroine, Portia is a wealthy woman from Belmont whose father has dictated that her marriage should be determined by a test wherein any suitor must choose from among three caskets; one who chooses the right casket will win Portia's hand, but those who choose wrongly must forfeit all hopes of marriage forever. She disguises herself as Balthasar, a young lawyer, to save Antonio in the crucial courtroom scene.
- Shylock - A Jewish moneylender, Shylock is the villain of the piece. The object of much abuse in the city, he thinks of nothing but greed and revenge. He lends money to Antonio in a contract that would give him a pound of the merchant's flesh if he defaults on the loan.
- Antonio - The merchant of the title, he is a wealthy and well-respected citizen of Venice. His desire to help his friend Bassanio court Portia leads him to take out a loan from Shylock; the sudden reversals in his financial affairs put his life in jeopardy at the hands of his enemy.
- Bassanio - A Venetian nobleman, friend of Antonio, who courts and wins Portia out of love for her.
- Gratiano - A friend of Bassanio, he accompanies the latter to Belmont when Bassanio courts Portia. Gratiano is loud and uncouth, and enjoys baiting Shylock.
- Lorenzo - A friend of Bassanio and Antonio, Lorenzo falls in love with an elopes with Shylock's daughter, Jessica.
- Jessica - Shylock's daughter, Jessica is in love with Lorenzo and unhappy in her father's house. She steals her father's money, runs away with Lorenzo, marries him, and converts to Christianity.
- Nerissa - Portia's lady in waiting, she assists Portia in her manipulation of the trial scene, and eventually marries Gratiano.

- Launcelot Gobbo - Shylock's servant, he is a clown who leaves his master, whom he hates, to serve Bassanio.
- Salerio and Solanio - Indistinguishable Venetian noblemen.
- Prince of Morocco and Prince of Aragon - Failed suitors of Portia.
- Tubal - A Jew of Venice and a friend of Shylock.

NOTABLE QUOTATIONS

“If to do were as easy to know what were god to do, chapels had been churches and poor men's cottages princes' palaces. It is a good divine that follows his own instructions; I can easier teach twenty what were good to be done, than to be one of the twenty to follow mine own teaching. The brain may devise laws for the blood, but a hot temper leaps o'er a cold decree; such a hare is madness the youth to skip o'er the meshes of good counsel the cripple.” (Portia, Iii, 12-20)

“Mark you this, Bassanio,
The devil can cite Scripture for his purpose.
An evil soul producing holy witness
Is like a villain with a smiling cheek,
A goodly apple rotten at the heart.
O what a goodly outside falsehood hath!” (Antonio, Iiii, 94-99)

This kindness will I show:
Go with me to a notary; seal me there
Your single bond, and, in a merry sport,
If you repay me not on such a day,
In such a place, such sum or sums as are
Expressed in the condition, let the forfeit
Be nominated for an equal pound
Of your fair flesh, to be cut off and taken
In what part of your body pleaseth me.” (Shylock, Iiii, 140-148)

“Alack, what heinous sin is it in me
To be ashamed to be my father's child!
But though I am a daughter to his blood,
I am not to his manners. O Lorenzo,
If thou keep promise, I shall end this strife,
Become a Christian and thy loving wife!” (Jessica, Iiii, 16-21)

“The first, of gold, who this inscription bears,
'Who chooseth me shall gain what many men desire.'
The second, silver, which this promise carries,
'Who chooseth me shall get as much as he deserves.'”

This third, dull lead, with warning all as blunt,
'Who chooseth me must give and hazard all he hath.'
How shall I know if I do choose the right?" (Morocco, IIvii, 4-10)

"All that glisters is not gold,
Often have you heard that told.
Many a man his life hath sold
But my outside to behold;
Gilded tombs do worms infold.
Had you been as wise as bold,
Young in limbs, in judgment old,
Your answer had not been inscrolled.
Fare you well, your suit is cold." (Message in gold casket, IIvii, 65-73)

"My daughter! O my ducats! O my daughter!
Fled with a Christian! O my Christian ducats!
Justice! The law! My ducats and my daughter!
A sealed bag, two sealed bags of ducats,
Of double ducats, stol'n from me by my daughter!
And jewels - two stones, two rich and precious stones,
Stol'n by my daughter! Justice! Find the girl!
She hath the stones upon her, and the ducats!" (Solanio quoting Shylock, IIviii, 15-22)

"The fire seven times tried this;
Seven times tried that judgment is
That did never choose amiss.
Some there be that shadows kiss;
Such have but a shadow's bliss.
There be fools alive iwis,
Silvered o'er, and so was this.
Take what wife you will to bed,
I will ever be your head.
So be gone, you are sped." (Message in silver casket, IIix, 62-71)

Salerio: "Why, I am sure if he forfeit thou wilt not take his flesh. What's that good for?"

Shylock: "To bait fish withal. If it will feed nothing else, it will feed my revenge. He hath disgraced me, and hind'ered me half a million, laughed at my losses, mocked at my gains, scorned my nation, thwarted my bargains, cooled my friends, heated mine enemies - and what's his reason? I am a Jew. Hath not a Jew eyes? Hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions? - fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means, warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer as a Christian is? If you prick us, do we not bleed? If you tickle us, do we not laugh? If you poison us, do we not die? And if you wrong us, shall we not revenge? If we are like you in the rest, we will resemble you in that. If a Jew wrong a Christian, what is his humility? Revenge! If a Christian wrong a Jew what should his sufferance be by Christian example? Why revenge! The villainy you teach me I will execute, and it shall go hard but I will better the instruction." (IIIi, 48-69)

“You that choose not by the view
Chance as fair, and choose as true.
Since this fortune falls to you,
Be content and seek no new.
If you be well pleased with this
And hold your fortune for your bliss,
Turn you where your lady is,
And claim her with a loving kiss.” (Message in lead casket, IIIii, 131-138)

“Thou call’dst me dog before thou hadst a cause,
But since I am a dog, beware my fangs.” (Shylock, IIIiii, 6-7)

“You’ll ask me why I rather choose to have
A weight of carrion flesh than to receive
Three thousand ducats. I’ll not answer that,
But say it is my humor. Is it answered?
What if my house be troubled with a rat,
And I be pleased to give ten thousand ducats
To have it baned? What, are you answered yet?
Some men there are love not a gaping pig,
Some that are mad if they behold a cat,
And others, when the bagpipe sings i’ th’ nose,
Cannot contain their urine; for affection,
Master of passion, sways it to the mood
Of what it likes or loathes. Now for your answer:
As there is no firm reason to be rend’red
Why he cannot abide a gaping pig,
Why he a harmless necessary cat,
Why he a woollen bagpipe, but of force
Must yield to such inevitable shame
As to offend, himself being offended;
So can I give no reason, nor will I not,
More than a lodged hate and a certain loathing
I bear Antonio, that I follow thus
A losing suit against him. Are you answered?” (Shylock, IVi, 40-62)

“The pound of flesh which I demand of him
Is dearly bought, is mine, and I will have it.” (Shylock, IVi, 99-100)

“The quality of mercy is not strained;
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven
Upon the place beneath. It is twice blest;
It blesseth him that gives and him that takes.
‘Tis mightiest in the mightiest; it becomes
The throned monarch better than his crown.

His scepter shows the force of temporal power,
The attribute to awe and majesty,
Wherein doth sit the dread and fear of kings;
But mercy is above this scept'ed sway;
It is enthroned in the hearts of kings,
It is an attribute of God himself,
And earthly power doth then show likest God's
When mercy seasons justice. Therefore, Jew,
Though justice be thy plea, consider this:
That, in the course of justice, none of us
Should see salvation. We do pray for mercy,
And that same prayer doth teach us all to render
The deeds of mercy. I have spoke thus much
To mitigate the justice of thy plea;
Which if thou follow, this strict court of Venice
Must needs give sentence 'gainst the merchant there. (Portia as Balthasar, IVi, 183-204)

“Commend me to your honorable wife.
Tell her the process of Antonio's end,
Say how I loved you, speak me fair in death;
And when the tale is told, bid her be judge
Whether Bassanio had not once a love.
Repent but you that you shall lose your friend,
And he repents not that he pays your debt;
For if the Jew do cut but deep enough,
I'll pay it instantly with all my heart.” (Antonio, IVi, 272-280)

“Tarry a little; there is something else.
This bond doth give thee here no jot of blood;
The words expressly are 'a pound of flesh.'
Then take thy bond, take thou thy pound of flesh;
But in the cutting it, if thou dost shed
One drop of Christian blood, thy lands and goods
Are by the laws of Venice confiscate
Unto the state of Venice.” (Portia as Balthasar, IVi, 304-311)

Bassanio: “If you did know to whom I gave the ring,
If you did know for whom I gave the ring,
And would conceive for what I gave the ring,
And how unwillingly I left the ring
When naught would be accepted but the ring,
You would abate the strength of your displeasure.”
Portia: “If you had known the virtue of the ring,
Or half her worthiness that gave the ring,
Or your own honor to contain the ring,
You would not then have parted with the ring.” (Vi, 193-202)

NOTES

Act I, scene 1 - The play opens with Antonio expressing feelings of depression that he is unable to explain. Salerio and Solanio think he is worried about his ships at sea, but he affirms that his investments are so diversified that he has no fear of loss, yet he is anxious still. Bassanio then arrives with Gratiano and Lorenzo. After a few jests, Bassanio remains with Antonio and asks him for a loan. It seems that Bassanio, who already owes Antonio money, has been living beyond his means, but now desires the funds needed to go to Belmont and woo a wealthy heiress named Portia, who is fair, wise, and noble. He hopes, through a successful endeavor, not only to secure his own happiness but also to repay his debt to his friend. Antonio agrees, though his money is presently tied up in his seagoing ventures, so that he will need to search out a loan in Venice.

Act I, scene 2 - We move now to Belmont, where we meet Portia. She is frustrated that she is unable to choose her own husband, but her father has made it a condition of his will that the one who gains her hand must do so by choosing from among three caskets. Nerissa, her maid, lists the suitors who have arrived at the estate, and Portia mocks each in turn. It seems that the only young man worthy of her affection is Bassanio, whom she met years before. The scene ends with the announcement that none of the suitors is willing to take the challenge of the caskets, but that a new one has arrived - the Prince of Morocco.

Act I, scene 3 - In Venice, Bassanio has contacted Shylock, a Jewish moneylender, and asked him for a loan of 3000 ducats for three months, for which Antonio will provide security. Shylock asks to speak to Antonio, and, when the merchant arrives, has much to say about his mistreatment at the hands of the Venetian citizens in general, and Antonio in particular. He hates Antonio because he lends money without interest, thus reducing Shylock's profit. Initially, Shylock refuses the loan because of his hatred for the merchant and the way he has been abused by him in public. Eventually he changes his tune, and agrees to loan the money without interest, but with the "merry bond" of a pound of the merchant's flesh. Antonio, fearing no loss because he has so many ships abroad, cheerfully agrees to the bond, though Bassanio has serious misgivings about Shylock's motives.

Act II, scene 1 - The Prince of Morocco arrives at Belmont. Portia meets him and describes the conditions of the casket test - the one who chooses rightly wins her hand, but one who chooses wrongly must agree to forswear marriage forever. Morocco, after describing his military prowess in gory detail, agrees to the terms of the test.

Act II, scene 2 - Launcelot Gobbo, a servant of Shylock, is debating whether or not to leave the Jew's service. He finally determines to do so. Shortly after, he meets his father, who is blind and doesn't recognize him. After several pages of banter, he indicates his desire to serve Bassanio, and asks his father to intercede on his behalf. Bassanio then arrives on the scene, and agrees to take Launcelot into his service. Gratiano then arrives and asks to accompany Bassanio on his trip to Belmont to woo Portia. Bassanio agrees, but only if Gratiano behaves himself.

Act II, scene 3 - Launcelot Gobbo says farewell to Shylock's daughter Jessica, who says she will miss him because of the fun he brings into an otherwise gloomy house. She then gives him a

message to take to Lorenzo at Bassanio's house. It is evident that she is in love with Lorenzo and hopes to marry him.

Act II, scene 4 - Lorenzo, Gratiano, Salerio, and Solanio prepare for a masque that evening. When Launcelot Gobbo tells Lorenzo that he is on his way to invite Shylock to dinner at Bassanio's house, Lorenzo gives him a message for Jessica. They are planning to elope that night during the masque.

Act II, scene 5 - Shylock warns Launcelot that he will be worse off in the household of Bassanio because the latter will not let him eat and sleep as much as Shylock has done. Shylock reluctantly accepts Bassanio's dinner invitation, arguing that he will be despoiling the hated Christians, both by eating Bassanio's food and by sending him such a wasteful wretch as Launcelot to serve in his household. Before he goes, he warns Jessica to shut the house tight during the night's revels, but Launcelot tells her that, if she looks out her window, she will see something worthwhile. Jessica is determined to flee with Lorenzo that very night.

Act II, scene 6 - Lorenzo and his friends arrive at the house of Shylock, where Jessica, disguised as a boy, leaves with them, bearing a chest full of Shylock's gold ducats.

Act II, scene 7 - The Prince of Morocco chooses the gold casket, which contains a skull. He thus loses his quest for Portia's hand, much to Portia's relief.

Act II, scene 8 - Salerio and Solanio converse, discussing the uproar caused by Shylock when he discovered the theft of his daughter and his ducats, and seemed unable to figure out which he missed the most. They also have heard word of a ship sunk in the English Channel, and hope it is not one of Antonio's. They then describe the great love manifest by Antonio toward Bassanio as the latter departed for Belmont with Gratiano.

Act II, scene 9 - The Prince of Aragon chooses the silver casket, which contains a fool's head (or often a mirror). He also loses his quest, again to Portia's relief. A messenger then announces the arrival of a handsome Venetian nobleman, whom Portia and Nerissa hope is Bassanio.

Act III, scene 1 - Solanio and Salerio discuss the rumor that one of Antonio's ships has sunk off the coast of England. Shylock arrives, bewailing the loss of his daughter and the money she stole when she left. He vows revenge against Antonio if he forfeits the bond. Tubal then arrives, and reports that he has been unable to locate Jessica, but has heard that she has been spending money profligately, and that another of Antonio's ships has been wrecked on the voyage back from Tunisia. Shylock, in a rage, wishes his daughter dead at his feet with the money in her coffin, and vows to cut out Antonio's heart should he be unable to pay the debt he owes.

Act III, scene 2 - At Belmont, Portia tries to convince Bassanio to delay for a month or two assaying the casket test so she may enjoy his company. Bassanio, however, is impatient to resolve the issue, and insists on taking the test. He chooses the lead casket, insisting that outward appearance counts for little where true value is concerned, and thus wins the hand of Portia. As they are rejoicing, Gratiano announces his love for Nerissa, and the two ask to be married at the same ceremony as Bassanio and Portia. Salerio then arrives with Lorenzo and Jessica, carrying a letter from Antonio

to the effect that all his ventures have miscarried and his bond is forfeit. Shylock intends to take his life. Bassanio and Gratiano determine to marry Portia and Nerissa immediately, then sail for Venice with sufficient funds (provided by Portia) to rescue Antonio.

Act III, scene 3 - In Venice, Shylock refuses all pleas and insists on his bond at Antonio's expense. Antonio's only remaining hope is that Bassanio will arrive with the money to pay the debt.

Act III, scene 4 - Portia leaves her estate under the supervision of Lorenzo and Jessica, claiming that she and Nerissa are going into seclusion to meditate and pray until their husbands return from Venice. Meanwhile, she sends a messenger to her cousin Doctor Bellario, a judge in Padua, requesting documents and clothing. She and Nerissa then depart.

Act III, scene 5 - Comic banter among Launcelot Gobbo, Jessica, and Lorenzo.

Act IV, scene 1 - The trial begins before the Duke of Venice, and Shylock refuses to show mercy, but insists on his bond. Even when Bassanio offers him six thousand ducats, he remains obstinate. Portia and Nerissa then arrive, disguised as a lawyer named Balthasar and his clerk, with letters of commendation from Bellario in Padua. She urges Shylock to be merciful, but he continues to demand justice, even when offered three times what he paid. Portia then announces that Antonio must forfeit the bond as agreed; he bares his chest, and Shylock brings out a scale to weigh the flesh. Portia then notes that the bond says nothing about blood, and tells Shylock that if he sheds one drop of Antonio's blood, his goods will be confiscated by the state. Shylock then tries to get the six thousand ducats he had been offered earlier, but Portia insists that, since he demanded the bond, he must take it. He then bargains for only his principal, but Portia still refuses. She then notes that, because he plotted against the life of a Venetian citizen, his life is forfeit and his goods are to be divided evenly between Antonio and the Venetian government. The Duke immediately gives Shylock his life, and tells him that the portion of his portion forfeit to the state may be reduced to a fine if Shylock demonstrates humility. Antonio agrees that his half of Shylock's fortune should be treated as an interest-free loan, with what remains to go to Jessica and Lorenzo upon his death. Furthermore, Shylock is to become a Christian, and leave all his money to Jessica and Lorenzo when he dies, as well. Shylock, defeated at every turn, agrees. Bassanio tries to pay Balthasar (Portia), who refuses, but when pressed, insists on the ring that Bassanio had received from Portia at their wedding, and had promised never to take off. Bassanio refuses, but then reluctantly changes his mind.

Act IV, scene 2 - Portia and Nerissa, on the way to Shylock's house to get him to sign the agreed-upon documents, are intercepted by Bassanio's messenger, bearing the requested ring. Nerissa then determines to pull the same trick on Gratiano, and they look forward to the encounter with their husbands when they all arrive at Belmont.

Act V, scene 1 - Portia, Nerissa, Bassanio, Gratiano, and Antonio all arrive at Belmont. Portia and Nerissa ask about the rings they gave their husbands, and both men insist they gave them to a lawyer and his clerk. The women accuse them of giving them to other women, and insist that they will deny them their beds until the rings are produced. They quickly forgive their husbands, but claim that, if their husbands ever leave them alone, they will share their beds with the lawyer and his clerk.

Portia and Nerissa then return the rings, maintaining that they had received them from the lawyer and his clerk in return for sharing their beds. Finally, the women admit their deception, pass on a letter that confirms that three of Antonio's argosies have safely come to harbor, and all happily enter the house to celebrate the outcome of the venture.

ESSAY QUESTIONS

Discuss the following in a five-paragraph essay:

1. Assess the extent to which Shakespeare takes a Christian approach to the issue of ethnic bigotry in *The Merchant of Venice*. Use specific examples.
2. In the scenes in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* where the three suitors vie for Portia's hand by choosing among three caskets, what are the lessons taught by the choice made by each man? Would you consider these lessons to be biblical ones? Why or why not?
3. In the trial scene (Act IV, scene 1, lines 215-221), Bassanio urges Portia, "To do a great right, do a little wrong / And curb this cruel devil of his will." Portia denies his request, fearing that "Twill be recorded as a precedent, / And many an error by the same example / Will rush into the state." With whom do you agree, Bassanio or Portia? Why? What would be the consequences of their two positions, both in the play and in life in general?
4. In William Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, what are the major reasons for Shylock's hatred of Antonio? Do you think these reasons are sufficient to explain his behavior? Why or why not?
5. Throughout the theatrical history of William Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, the character of Shylock has been acted in two very different ways - as a comic villain and the butt of justifiable ridicule, or as a tragic figure, persecuted, misunderstood, and deserving of pity. Which approach to the character do you consider to be more appropriate? Why? Justify your answer with specifics from the text of the play.
6. Analyze the concept of retribution in William Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*. Choose one main character from the play, and discuss the extent to which this character gets what he or she deserves by the end of the story. Is the way in which the concept of retribution is worked out in accordance with biblical principle? Why or why not?
7. Analyze the moral lessons contained in the verses found in the three caskets in William Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*. What type of person did Portia's father think would choose each one? Evaluate the characteristics of which he approved and disapproved on the basis of Scripture.
8. Choose a contemporary figure who fits the qualities described in the verses found in each of the caskets in William Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*. Why do you think each of these people match the description found in the respective casket?

9. Evaluate the character of Jessica in William Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*. Is she to be admired or condemned for her actions? Why? Support your conclusion with specifics from the play.
10. In 1594, only a few years before the writing of William Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, Queen Elizabeth's personal physician, a converted Portuguese Jew named Dr. Roderigo Lopez, was convicted and executed after being accused of trying to poison the queen. In what ways does Shakespeare's portrayal of Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice* play upon the fears of the people of England in the late sixteenth century that Jews were a threat to the stability of the realm?
11. Evaluate Shylock's speech in Act III, scene 1 of William Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* ("Hath not a Jew eyes..."). Is the speech intended to gain sympathy for Shylock's humanity, or to rationalize his vengeance? Support your conclusion with three different arguments, supporting each from specific speeches or incidents elsewhere in the play.
12. Discuss the attitude toward commercialism found in William Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*. Is the search for material gain viewed in positive or negative terms by the playwright? Use specific incidents and speeches from the play to support your conclusion, and assess the play's vision of commercialism from a biblical standpoint.
13. In Act I, scene 3 of William Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, Shylock and Antonio disagree over the appropriate application of the story of Jacob and Laban in Genesis 30-31. Whose interpretation is more faithful to the text of Scripture, Shylock's or Antonio's? Why do you think so?
14. In William Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, Shylock is often pictured standing stubbornly for the letter of the law, particularly in the trial scene (Act IV, scene 1). Compare and contrast his attitudes with those of the Pharisees in Jesus' day. In what ways are they similar? In what ways could Shylock have been subjected to the same criticisms that Jesus directed toward the religious leaders of His day?
15. Compare and contrast the trial scene (Act IV, scene 1) from William Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* to the story of Daniel in the Lions' Den from Daniel 6. How is Shylock like the Babylonian satraps, and Antonio like the Old Testament prophet? What other comparisons and contrasts can you see in the stories? Be sure to cite specifics from both accounts.
16. In William Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, whom would you consider to be the most Christian character in the play? Why? Remember to defend your conclusion with specific incidents and quotations from the play.
17. At various points in William Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, Bassanio is torn between his love for Portia and his friendship for Antonio. What do the speeches and plot developments of the play suggest concerning the relative values of romantic love and friendship? Support your conclusions with specifics from the play.

18. Using the friendship between Antonio and Bassanio in William Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* as a model, discuss the chief characteristics of friendship as portrayed in the play. What are the most important traits of a true friend? Be specific, and support your points with quotations from the script.
19. In William Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, the character of Bassanio is somewhat problematic. He has spent himself into debt, borrows money in order to court Portia, and seems more than a little interested in her fortune. Would you describe him more as a virtuous lover or a fortune hunter? Why? Support your conclusion with specifics from the play.
20. The Roman writer Themistocles once said, in reference to his daughter's impending marriage, "I prefer a man without money to money without a man." Would Portia, the heroine of William Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, have agreed with this sentiment? Why or why not? Support your conclusion with specifics from the play.
21. At the end of *It's a Wonderful Life*, George Bailey, played by Jimmy Stewart, reads a note that says, "Remember, no man is a failure who has friends." Would the main characters of William Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* have agreed? Why or why not? Support your conclusion with specifics from the play.
22. Compare and contrast the plots and main characters of William Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* and the movie *It's a Wonderful Life*. Be sure to address the subjects of money, friendship, and romantic love and the roles they play in the respective stories.
23. In the trial scene (Act IV, scene 1) of William Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, Portia, in her famous speech about the quality of mercy, says, "... in the course of justice, none of us / Should see salvation. We do pray for mercy / And that same prayer doth teach us all to render / The deeds of mercy." Evaluate Portia's words in the light of Jesus' parable in Matthew 18:21-35. Compare and contrast the stories told by Jesus and Shakespeare, focusing especially on the major lessons they convey.
24. In Matthew 6:34, Jesus tells His disciples, "Do not worry about tomorrow." To what extent do the "Christian" characters in William Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* live by this precept? Do you believe that they are placing their confidence in God or in Fate? Why? In what ways do the unsavory characters, including Shylock and the two suitors who fail to gain Portia's hand, fail to take this approach to life?
25. In the trial scene (Act IV, scene 1) in William Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, would you say that justice or injustice is done by the final decision rendered by the court? Support your conclusion with specifics from the scene as well as biblical justification.
26. To what extent does William Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* illustrate the biblical precept of loving one's enemies? Support your conclusion with specifics from the play.

27. In William Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, would you conclude that Bassanio is a worthy match for Portia? Why or why not? Support your conclusion with specifics from the play.
28. In William Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, is the character of Shylock defined more by his religion or his occupation? Why do you think so? Support your conclusion with specifics from the play.
29. Compare and contrast the characters of Isaac of York in Sir Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe* and Shylock in William Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*. Both are in many ways stereotypes, yet both also have humanizing characteristics that take them beyond the prejudices of the ages in which they were written. Given the fact that the two accounts were written more than two hundred years apart, do they show any progress in the English understanding of the Jewish people? Remember that, while Scott wrote in the early nineteenth century, he was describing events that took place in the late twelfth century, so evaluate the authors' perspectives rather than those shown by the characters in the stories.
30. Compare and contrast the tests of love to which characters are subjected in William Shakespeare's *King Lear* and *The Merchant of Venice*. How does Shakespeare use one test to illustrate wisdom by contrast with folly and the other to illustrate folly by contrast with wisdom? Do you think Goneril, Regan, and Cordelia symbolize the same truths as the gold, silver and lead caskets?
31. Compare and contrast the treatments of the theme of mercy in William Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* and *The Merchant of Venice*. Both plays are somewhat uncomfortable comedies, yet both speak strongly of the need for mercy. Are their conclusions on the subject biblical? Why or why not?
32. In three of William Shakespeare's plays, the main character is alienated from the society in which he lives because of what would today be considered his status as a minority - Othello is black, Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice* is Jewish, and Richard III, a hunchback, is physically handicapped. Based on the content of the plays themselves, which minority group would you conclude was the object of the greatest discrimination in Elizabethan England? Which of the three treatments is most acceptable to modern sensibilities? Why do you think so?
33. Compare and contrast the tricks involving rings in William Shakespeare's *All's Well That Ends Well* and *The Merchant of Venice*. Consider the circumstances under which the rings are given and the motivations behind the chicanery involved. How do the tricks contribute to the "comic" nature of the two plays?