



**A STUDY GUIDE OF  
CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE'S  
*DOCTOR FAUSTUS***

**Compiled by**

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## **A profile of *Doctor Faustus***

- The play under the title *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus*.

### **Narrator**

- None for the most part, but the Chorus appears between scenes and provides information and comments on the action.

### **Point of view**

- Faustus is the central figure in the play, and he has several long soliloquies that let us see things from his point of view.

### **Tone**

- Grandiose and tragic, with occasional moments of low comedy

### **Tense**

- The Chorus, who provides the only narration, alternates between the present and past tenses.

### **Setting**

- The 1580s, Europe, specifically Germany and Italy

### **Protagonist**

- Doctor Faustus

### **Major conflict**

- Faustus sells his soul to Lucifer in exchange for twenty-four years of power.
- A desire to repent begins to plague him as the fear of hell grows.

### **Rising action**

- Faustus's study of dark magic and his conversations with Mephistopheles

### **Climax**

- Faustus's sealing of the pact that promises his soul to Lucifer.

### **Falling action**

- Faustus's traveling of the world and performing of **magic** for various rulers

### **Themes**

Sin – redemption – damnation – The conflict between medieval and Renaissance values – absolute power and corruption – The split of human nature

## Motifs

- Magic and the supernatural – practical jokes

## Symbols

- Blood: Faustus's rejection of the ancient authorities
- The good angel and the evil angel

## Foreshadowing

- The play constantly hints at Faustus's ultimate damnation:  
His blood congeals when he tries to sign away his soul.  
The words *Homo fuge*, meaning "Fly, man!" appear on his arm.  
He is always tormented by fears of hell.

## Context

- BORN in CANTERBURY in 1564, the same year as William Shakespeare, Christopher Marlowe was an actor, poet, and playwright during the reign of Britain's Queen Elizabeth I.
- In late-sixteenth-century England, Catholicism was a forbidden faith and Protestantism was the religion supported by the state.
- In 1593, Marlowe's career was cut short. After being accused of heresy (believing in ideas contrary to those approved by religion), he was arrested and put on a sort of probation.
- Shortly after being released, Marlowe was killed.
- *Doctor Faustus* tells the story of an individual selling his soul to the devil in exchange for knowledge which is an old motif in Christian folklore.
- The phrase "Faustian bargain" has entered the English lexicon, referring to any deal made for a short-term gain with great costs in the long run.

## Plot Overview

- Doctor Faustus is a German scholar who rejects the limits of traditional knowledge such as logic, medicine, law, and religion.
- Therefore, Faustus decides that he wants to learn to practice magic.
- His friends Valdes and Cornelius teach him the black arts, and he begins his new career as a magician by summoning up Mephistopheles, a devil.
- Faustus tells Mephistopheles that he wants to offer his soul to Lucifer in exchange for twenty-four years of their service.
- Mephistopheles warns Faustus about the horrors of hell, but Faustus insists on offering his soul to Lucifer.
- Mephistopheles returns to Faustus with word that Lucifer has accepted Faustus's offer.
- Faustus signs the deal with his blood and, shortly, the words "Homo fuge," Latin for "O man, fly," appear on his arm.
- Faustus starts to think of repent and saving his soul, but Mephistopheles seduces him with rich gifts and gives him a book of spells to learn.
- Mephistopheles answers all of Faustus' questions except only one question which is about who made the universe.
- This refusal makes Faustus think of repenting and saving his soul, but Mephistopheles and Lucifer create a show of the Seven Deadly Sins.
- Faustus is impressed enough to quiet his doubts.
- Armed with his new powers and attended by Mephistopheles, Faustus begins to travel from one place to another.
- He goes to the pope's court in Rome, makes himself invisible, and disrupts the pope's banquet by stealing food and boxing the pope's ears.
- Following this incident, he travels through Europe, with his fame spreading as he goes.
- He is invited to the court of the German emperor, Charles V (the enemy of the pope), who asks Faustus to allow him to see Alexander the Great, the famed Macedonian

king and conqueror the fourth century B.C.

- Faustus conjures up an image of Alexander, and Charles is impressed.
- Eventually, Faustus is invited to the court of the Duke of Vanholt, where he performs various tricks.
- As the twenty-four years deal with Lucifer comes to a close end, Faustus begins to fear his near death.
- Faustus has Mephistopheles call up Helen of Troy, the famous beauty from the ancient world, and uses her presence to impress a group of scholars.
- An old man urges Faustus to repent, but Faustus drives him away. Faustus even summons Helen again.
- But time is growing short. Faustus tells the scholars about his deal. They get terrified and pray for him.
- On the final night before the expiration of the twenty-four years, Faustus is overcome by fear and remorse. He begs for mercy, but it is too late.
- At midnight, a group of devils appears and carries his soul off to hell. In the morning, the scholars find Faustus's body and decide to hold a funeral for him.

## Character List

- **Faustus**
  - The protagonist. Faustus represents the Renaissance scholar whose ambition for knowledge and wealth makes him willing to pay his soul as a price to Lucifer in exchange for knowledge and authority.
  - Faustus's self is always divided. He is not sure whether to repent or continue selling his soul.
  - Eventually, he lacks inner strength to repent.
- **Mephistopheles**
  - A devil whom Faustus summons with his magical experiments.
  - Mephistopheles's motivations seem paradoxical: he wants to carry Faustus's soul off to hell.
  - However, he also tries to warn Faustus about the horrors of hell.
  - Mephistopheles is ultimately as tragic a figure as Faustus.
  - He shows regret for the eternal separation from God and confirms that this

damnation is itself another hell.

- **Chorus**

- A character who provides narration and commentary. The Chorus was customary in Greek tragedy.

- **Old Man**

- He tries to make Faustus repent and to ask God for mercy and forgiveness.

- **Good Angel**

- A spirit that tries to make Faustus repent and return to God. Along with the old man and the bad angel, the good angel represents Faustus's conscience and divided will between good and evil.

- **Evil Angel**

- A spirit that tries to make Faustus continue in his deal with Lucifer.

- **Lucifer**

- The prince of devils, the ruler of hell, and Mephistopheles's master.

- **Wagner**

- Faustus's servant. He provides comic relief in the play.

- **Clown**

- Wagner's servant. The clown provides comic relief: he is a ridiculous character, and his absurd behavior contrasts with Faustus's grandeur.

- As the play goes on, Faustus's behavior becomes similar to the clown's.

- **Robin**

- An innkeeper, who also contrasts with Faustus's grandeur.

- Robin and his friend Rafe learn some basic conjuring, demonstrating that even the least scholarly can possess skill in magic.

- Marlowe includes Robin and Rafe to illustrate Faustus's degradation since he started to show the same ridiculous and trivial behavior.

- **Valdes and Cornelius**

- Faustus magician friends who teach him the art of black magic.

- **Horse courser**

- A horse-trader who buys a horse from Faustus.

- Faustus cheats on him as sells him a cursed horse.

- **The Scholars**

- Faustus's colleagues at the University of Wittenberg.

- They are loyal to Faustus as they did not like that Faustus turned from studying

sciences to practicing black magic.

- At the end, they know about Faustus's deal with Lucifer and pray for him.

- **The pope**

- The head of the Roman Catholic Church.

- He serves as a symbol of the religious faith that Faustus has rejected.

## **Analysis of Major Characters**

- **Faustus**

- Faustus is the protagonist and tragic hero of Marlowe's play.

- He is a paradoxical character: he is eloquent and ambitious. Yet, he abandons established knowledge for black arts (magic).

- At the beginning, Faustus thinks of all the marvels that his magical powers will produce. He imagines piling up wealth, reshaping the map of Europe, and gaining access to every knowledge about the universe.

- Faustus represents the spirit of the Renaissance which rejected the medieval idea that God is the only master of the universe.

- The Renaissance embraced human powers versus God. Therefore, Faustus is the personification of human possibility and power.

- Faustus decided that a deal with the devil is the only way to fulfill his ambitions.

- Sometimes Faustus thinks that hell exists, but it is not so bad. At other times, he thinks hell does not even exist.

- Faustus repeatedly approaches repentance but goes back at the last moment.

- Sometimes, it seems a matter of pride and ambition or he thinks God will not accept him. Other times, it seems that Mephistopheles could prevent him.

- Once Faustus gains magical powers, he does not know what to do with them.

- This may suggest that knowledge ultimately leads toward God.

- Absolute power corrupts Faustus: once he can do everything, he no longer wants to do anything.

- Instead, he travels around Europe and playing tricks on people. Simply, he uses his gifts for entertainment only.

- When Faustus regains vision, it is the vision of hell that will swallow his soul.
- In Faustus's final hours, his desire for repentance finally wins out but too late.
- Faustus becomes a tragic hero who bears the seeds of his own destruction.
- **Mephistopheles**
  - Mephistopheles has mixed motives:
  - First, he tells Faustus that his soul will be taken to hell after his deal with Lucifer.
  - When Faustus declares that he does not believe in hell, Mephistopheles insists that hell is real and terrible, as Faustus comes to know soon enough.
  - Then, when Faustus insisted on his deal, Mephistopheles always prevents Faustus from going back to God by seduction or threat.
  - Mephistopheles is a paradoxical character. He seeks to damn Faustus, but he himself is cursed and speaks freely of the horrors of hell.
  - Faustus and Mephistopheles dominate the play because they are proud spirits doomed to hell.

## **Themes, Motifs & Symbols**

### **Themes**

*Themes are the fundamental and often universal ideas explored in a literary work.*

- **Sin, Redemption, and Damnation**
  - *Dr Faustus* is a play that deals with many Christian themes.
  - The Christian idea of sin is to act against the will of God.
  - In Christianity, even the worst deed can be forgiven through redemption.
  - The possibility of redemption is always open to Faustus. All that he needs to do is ask God for forgiveness.
  - There are many moments in the play in which Faustus considers redemption, urged by the good angel or by the old man.
  - Both the good angel and the old man can be seen either as messengers of God or a personification of Faustus's conscience.
  - Each time, Faustus decides to remain loyal to hell rather than seek heaven.



- This turning away from God condemns him to spend an eternity in hell.
- At the end of his life Faustus desires to repent crying out to Christ. But it is too late for him to repent.
- At the end of the play, Marlowe steps outside the Christian worldview to maximize the dramatic power of the final scene since Faustus is still alive but cannot repent.
- **The Conflict Between Medieval and Renaissance Values**
  - One of the play's central themes is the clash between the medieval world and the Renaissance.
  - The medieval world insisted on theology as the main science. It glorified God and lowered the man and the natural world.
  - The Renaissance was a movement that began in Italy in the fifteenth century and soon spread throughout Europe.
  - The Renaissance insisted on the individual above everything. It glorified science and experiments.
  - Faustus rejects the medieval worldview. He rejects all limits and authorities in his quest for knowledge, wealth, and power.
  - After his deal with Lucifer, Faustus descends from grand ambitions to trivial tricks.
  - Marlowe may be suggesting that the Renaissance spirit, though ambitious, will lead only to a Faustian dead end or tragedy.
- **Power as a Corrupting Influence**
  - Before the deal with Lucifer, Faustus sought wealth, solving the mysteries of the universe, and reshaping Europe.
  - These ambitions make Faustus' quest seem heroic, which is reinforced by his eloquence.
  - Once Faustus gains magical powers, he gradually turns into just a clown.
  - Instead of his grand ambitions, he sticks to tricks to amuse kings and noblemen.
  - power did not corrupt Faustus by making him evil but by transforming his ambition into a meaningless delight in trivial tricks.
  - In other words, by cutting himself off from God, Faustus is condemned to

mediocrity.

- **The Divided Nature of Man**

- Faustus is always undecided about whether he should return to God or continue with Lucifer.
- The good angel and the evil angel who tried to make Faustus repent symbolize the struggle between good and evil.

## Motifs

**Motifs are repeated structures, contrasts, or literary devices that can help to develop and inform the text's major themes.**

- **Magic and the Supernatural**

- The supernatural is a main element of *Doctor Faustus*.
- Angels and devils appear to Faustus.
- Faustus uses magic to play tricks on people, explore the cosmos riding a dragon.
- However, contrary to Faustus' earlier ambitions, nothing significant is accomplished through magic.

- **Practical Jokes**

- Once he gains his powers, Faustus does not use them to do great deeds.
- Marlowe employs jokes to illustrate Faustus's decline from a great, prideful scholar into a mediocre magician with no higher ambition than to have a laugh at everything.

## Symbols

**Symbols are objects, characters, figures, or colors used to represent abstract ideas or concepts.**

- **Blood**

- Blood plays multiple symbolic roles in the play.
- Faustus signs the deal with Lucifer using his blood which symbolizes the fatality of this deal.
- On signing the deal, Faustus' blood congeals which symbolizes God's warning.

- The Christ's blood which Faustus sees across the sky during his last night, symbolizes the sacrifice that Jesus made on the cross.
- **Faustus's Rejection of the Ancient Authorities**
  - In scene 1, Faustus goes through a list of the major fields of human knowledge including logic, medicine, law, and theology.
  - He cites for each an ancient authority including Aristotle, Galen, Justinian, and Jerome's Bible, respectively.
  - He then rejects all of these figures in favor of magic.
  - This rejection symbolizes Faustus's break with the medieval world, which prized God above all else, in favor of a Renaissance spirit, which favors experimentation and innovation.
- **The Good Angel and the Evil Angel**
  - The good angel urged him to repent and serve God.
  - The evil angel urged him to follow his lust for power and serve Lucifer.
  - The two symbolize his divided will.

## **Summary & Analysis**

### ➤ **Prologue Summary**

- The Chorus introduces the plot of the play.
- After earning the title of Doctor of Divinity, Faustus became famous for his ability to discuss theological matters.
- The Chorus adds that Faustus is "swollen with cunning" and has begun to practice necromancy, or black magic (Prologue.20).
- The Prologue concludes by stating that Faustus is in his study.

### ➤ **Prologue Analysis**

- Since there is a Chorus, *Doctor Faustus* follows the tradition of Greek tragedy.
- Here, the Chorus gives us information about Faustus's life and education.
- The Chorus also tells us that Faustus's pride will lead to self-destruction.
- Faustus's story could be compared to the Greek myth of Icarus, a boy whose

father, Daedalus, gave him wings made out of feathers and wax.

- Icarus did not consider his father's warning and flew too close to the sun, causing his wings to melt and sending him to his death.
- In the same way, the Chorus tells us, Faustus will "mount above his reach" and suffer the consequences (Prologue.21).
- The Prologue locates its drama in the Renaissance world: an ordinary man like Faustus is as important as any king or warrior so his story is worthy of being told.

## Scene 1

### ➤ Scene 1 Summary

**"These metaphysics of magicians, And necromantic books are heavenly!"**

- In a long soliloquy, Faustus reflects on:
  1. Logic: Faustus cites Aristotle but then declares that logical disputes seem to be the only goal of logic.
  2. Medicine: Faustus cites the Greek physician Galen but then declares that it is not the most fruitful pursuit.
  3. Law: Faustus cites the Byzantine emperor Justinian but then declares that law only deals with trivial matters.
  4. Divinity: Faustus cites St. Jerome's Bible that "the reward of sin is death" but then declares that he does not accept this.
- Faustus finally chooses magic which he believes will make him "a mighty god" (1.62).
- Faustus asks Wagner to bring Valdes and Cornelius, Faustus's friends, to help him learn the art of magic.
- A good angel and an evil angel visit Faustus. The good angel advises him to return to God. The evil angel encourages him to continue in his deal with Lucifer.
- Valdes and Cornelius appear. Faustus tells them that he has left his studies in favor of magic.
- They agree to teach Faustus the principles of magic.

- Cornelius tells him that “the miracles that magic will perform/ Will make thee vow to study nothing else” (1.136–137).
- Valdes lists a number of texts that Faustus should read, and the two friends promise to help him become better at magic than even they are.

### ➤ Scene 1 Analysis

- Faustus does not want merely to protect men’s bodies through medicine, nor does he want to protect their property through law.
- Faustus is not a villain; he is a tragic hero whose character flaws lead to his downfall.
- The logic Faustus uses to reject religion may be flawed, but there is something impressive in the breadth of his ambition.

## Scenes 2–4

### ➤ Scene 2 Summary

- Two scholars come to see Faustus. tells them that Faustus is meeting with Valdes and Cornelius.
- Aware that Valdes and Cornelius are magicians, the scholars leave with heavy hearts fearing that Faustus may also be falling into “that damned art” as well (2.29).

### ➤ Scene 3 Summary

*“Think’st thou that I, who saw the face of God,  
And tasted the eternal joys of heaven,  
Am not tormented with ten thousand hells  
In being deprived of everlasting bliss?”*

- Faustus stands in a magical circle marked with various signs and words, and he chants in Latin.
- Four devils and Lucifer, the ruler of hell, watch him from the shadows.
- Faustus renounces God and demands that Mephistopheles rise to serve him.
- The devil Mephistopheles appears before Faustus, who commands him to depart, and return dressed as a Franciscan friar, since “that holy shape becomes a

devil best" (3.26).

- Mephistopheles then reappears, dressed as a monk, and asks Faustus what he desires.
- Faustus demands his obedience, but Mephistopheles says that he is Lucifer's servant and can obey only Lucifer.
- Faustus asks Mephistopheles about Lucifer and hell. He learns that Lucifer and all his devils were once angels who rebelled against God and have been damned to hell forever.
- Faustus points out that Mephistopheles is not in hell now but on earth.
- Mephistopheles insists, however, that he and his fellow demons are always in hell, even when they are on earth, because being deprived of the presence of God is hell enough.
- Faustus declares that he will offer his soul to Lucifer in return for twenty-four years of Mephistopheles's service.
- Mephistopheles agrees to take this offer to his Lucifer and departs.
- Left alone, Faustus remarks that if he had "as many souls as there be stars," he would offer them all to hell in return for the kind of power that Mephistopheles offers him (3.102).
- He eagerly awaits Mephistopheles's return.

#### ➤ **Scene 4 Summary**

- Wagner learns magic and persuades a clown to become his servant.
- After agreeing to be Wagner's servant, the clown changes his mind.
- Wagner threatens to cast a spell on him. Seeing the devils, the clown becomes terrified and agrees to Wagner's demands.
- After Wagner dismisses the devils, the clown asks his new master if he can learn to conjure as well, and Wagner promises to teach him how to turn himself into any kind of animal—but he insists on being called "Master Wagner."

## ➤ Scenes 2–4 Analysis

- Having learned the necessary arts from Cornelius and Valdes, Faustus now takes the first step toward selling his soul when he conjures up a devil.
- Faustus summons Mephistopheles but he is watched by Lucifer.
- Neither Mephistopheles nor Lucifer forced Faustus to reject God.
- Indeed, Mephistopheles tells Faustus that his master, Lucifer, is less powerful than God.
- Furthermore, Mephistopheles offers a powerful portrait of hell that seems to warn against any deal with Lucifer.
- When Faustus asks him how it is that he is allowed to leave hell in order to come to earth, Mephistopheles says:

*Why this is hell, nor am I out of it.  
Think'st thou that I, who saw the face of God,  
And tasted the eternal joys of heaven,  
Am not tormented with ten thousand hells  
In being deprived of everlasting bliss? (3.76–80)*

- Mephistopheles exposes the horrors of his own experience as if offering guidance to Faustus.
- Indeed, Mephistopheles even tells Faustus to abandon his “frivolous demands” (3.81).
- But Faustus refuses to leave his desires. Instead, he exhibits blindness that serves as one of his defining characteristics throughout the play.
- Faustus sees the world as he wants to see it rather than as it is.
- Faustus sees the devil’s true shape, but rather than flee in terror he tells Mephistopheles to change his appearance, which makes looking upon him easier.
- Again, when Mephistopheles has finished telling him of the horrors of hell and urging him not to sell his soul, Faustus dismisses what Mephistopheles has said, accusing him of lacking “manly fortitude” (3.85).
- As the play progresses, Faustus’s grandeur diminishes, and he sinks down toward the level of the clowns, suggesting that degradation precedes damnation.

## Scenes 5–6

### ➤ Scene 5 Summary

*Think'st thou that Faustus is so fond to imagine*

*That after this life there is any pain?*

*Tush, these are trifles and mere old wives' tales.*

- The good angel tells Faustus to abandon his plan and “think of heaven, and heavenly things,” but he dismisses the good angel’s words, saying that God does not love him (5.20).
- The evil angel convinces Faustus that the wealth he can gain through his deal with the devil is worth the cost.
- Faustus calls back Mephistopheles, who tells him that Lucifer has accepted his offer of his soul in exchange for twenty-four years of service.
- Faustus asks Mephistopheles why Lucifer wants his soul, and Mephistopheles tells him that Lucifer seeks to enlarge his kingdom and make humans suffer even as he suffers.
- Faustus decides to make the bargain, and he stabs his arm to confirm the deal in blood.
- However, when he signed the pact, his blood congealed, and writing became impossible.
- Mephistopheles goes to fetch fire in order to loosen the blood, and, while he is gone, Faustus wonders if his blood is attempting to warn him not to sell his soul.
- When Mephistopheles returns, Faustus signs the pact and then discovers an inscription on his arm that reads “Homo fuge,” Latin for “O man, fly” (5.77).
- While Faustus wonders where he should fly, Mephistopheles presents a group of devils, who cover Faustus with crowns and rich garments.
- Faustus puts aside his doubts. He hands over the pact, which promises his body and soul to Lucifer in exchange for twenty-four years of service from Mephistopheles.
- After signing the pact, Faustus asks Mephistopheles where hell is located, and Mephistopheles says that it has no exact location but exists everywhere.



- Faustus remarks that he thinks hell is a myth.
- Mephistopheles gives Faustus a book of magic spells and tells him to read it.
- Faustus once questions his path and thinks about returning back to God.
- The good and evil angels appear again, and Faustus realizes that his “heart’s so hardened I cannot repent!” (5.196).
- He then begins to ask Mephistopheles questions about the planets and the heavens. Mephistopheles answers all his queries willingly, until Faustus asks who made the world.
- Mephistopheles refuses to reply because the answer is “against our kingdom”; when Faustus presses him, Mephistopheles departs angrily (5.247).
- Faustus then turns his mind to God, and again he wonders if it is too late for him to repent.
- The good and evil angels enter once more, and the good angel says it is never too late for Faustus to repent.
- Faustus calls the Christ for mercy, but then Lucifer, Belzebub (another devil), and Mephistopheles enter.
- They tell Faustus to stop thinking of God and then present a show of the Seven Deadly Sins.
- Each sin—Pride, Covetousness, Envy, Wrath, Gluttony, Sloth, and finally Lechery—appears before Faustus and makes a brief speech.
- The sight of the sins delights Faustus’s soul, and he asks to see hell.
- Lucifer promises to take him there that night. He gives Faustus a book that teaches him how to change his shape.

### ➤ **Scenes 5–6 Analysis**

- Faustus’s real mistake is to misinterpret what Mephistopheles tells him about hell.
- Faustus’s arm stabbing alludes to the wounds of the crucified Christ.
- The limits of the demonic gifts that Faustus has been given begin to emerge.
- All the worldly knowledge that Faustus has so strongly leads toward God.

- The central irony is that the pact he has made completely detaches him from God. Faustus has nowhere to go but down.

## **Chorus 2–Scene 8**

### ➤ **Chorus 2 Summary**

- Wagner takes the stage and describes how Faustus traveled through the heavens on a chariot pulled by dragons in order to learn the secrets of astronomy.
- Wagner tells us that Faustus is now traveling to measure the coasts and kingdoms of the world and that his travels will take him to Rome.

### ➤ **Scene 7 Summary**

- Faustus appears, recounting to Mephistopheles his travels throughout Europe—first from Germany to France and then on to Italy.
- It is a day of feasting in Rome, to celebrate the pope's victories, and Faustus and Mephistopheles agree to use their powers to play tricks on the pope.
- During the meal, Faustus and Mephistopheles make themselves invisible and then throw dishes and food around the table.
- The churchmen suspect that there is some ghost in the room, and the pope begins to cross himself.
- Faustus boxes the pope's ear, and the pope and all his attendants run away.

### ➤ **Scene 8 Summary**

- Robin conjures up Mephistopheles for a prank.
- Mephistopheles threatens to turn Robin and Rafe into an ape and a dog.

### ➤ **Chorus 2–Scene 8 Analysis**

- Faustus' magical abilities seem more like cheap tricks as the play progresses.
- His interests also diminish in importance from astronomy, the study of the heavens, to cosmography, the study of the earth.
- By the end of the play, his interests are only playing jokes and producing impressive illusions for nobles.

- Faustus's interactions with the pope and his men is an attack on the Catholic Church.
- By making fun of the Pope, Marlowe ridicules the Catholic Church.
- Yet the absurdity of the scene suggests that the pope and his attendants possess some kind of divine power, which makes them symbols of Christianity.
- When the pope and his monks recite the bible, Faustus and Mephistopheles seem to fear the power that their words invoke.
- Mephistopheles says, "We shall be cursed with bell, / book, and candle" (7.81–82).
- The power these religious symbols have over Mephistopheles suggests that God remains stronger than the devil and that perhaps Faustus could still be able to return to God.
- Faustus's reply, "Bell, book and candle; candle, book, and bell / Forward and backward, to curse Faustus to hell" is a foreshadowing (7.83–84).
- Hell, of course, is exactly where Faustus is "cursed" to go, but through his own folly and not the curses of monks or the pope.
- Faustus is becoming just a clown more and more.

## **Chorus 3–Scene 9**

### ➤ **Chorus 3 Summary**

- The Chorus enters to inform us that Faustus has returned home to Germany and developed his fame by what he learned during his journey.
- The German emperor, Charles V, has heard of Faustus and invited him to his palace, where we next encounter him.

### ➤ **Scene 9 Summary**

- The emperor tells Faustus that he would like to see Alexander the Great and his lover.
- Faustus tells him that he cannot produce their actual bodies but can create spirits of them.
- A knight present in the court asserts that Faustus cannot perform this action.

- Faustus creates a vision of Alexander embracing his lover.
- As a revenge, Faustus conjures a pair of antlers onto the head of the knight. The knight pleads for mercy.

### ➤ Chorus 3–Scene 9 Analysis

- Twenty-four years passed. The deal with Lucifer is about to end.
- It is ironic that all of Mephistopheles's power in Faustus's hands is to produce only impressive illusions.

## Scenes 10–11

### ➤ Scene 10 Summary

- Faustus, meanwhile, meets a horse-courser and sells him his horse.
- Faustus warns him not to ride the horse into the water.
- Faustus begins to think about the expiration of his contract with Lucifer and falls asleep. The horse-courser reappears, sopping wet, complaining that when he rode his horse into water, it turned into a heap of straw.
- He decides to get his money back and tries to wake Faustus. He then pulls on Faustus's leg when Faustus will not wake. The leg breaks off, and Faustus wakes up, screaming bloody murder.
- The horse-courser takes the leg and runs off. Meanwhile, Faustus's leg is immediately restored, and he laughs at the joke that he has played.
- Wagner then enters and tells Faustus that the Duke of Vanholt has summoned him. Faustus agrees to go, and they depart together.

### ➤ Scenes 10–11 Analysis

- Faustus's turn from tragic greatness to mediocrity continues in these scenes.
- The power and importance of his hosts decreases from scene to scene, just as Faustus's magic grow ever more unimpressive.
- Faustus has lost his hold on grandeur and has become pathetic.
- The decline perhaps criticizes worldly ambition and the entire project of the Renaissance, which pushed God aside and wanted mastery over the world.

- It seems that the desire for complete knowledge and power can ultimately be reduced to nothing.
- Faustus doom begins to weigh upon him.
- As he sits down to fall asleep, he remarks, “What art thou, Faustus, but a man condemned to die?” (10.24).
- Yet, at this moment at least, he seems convinced that he will repent at the last minute and be saved—a significant change from his earlier attitude.

## Chorus 4–Epilogue

### ➤ Chorus 4 Summary

- Wagner announces that Faustus must be about to die because he has given Wagner all of his wealth. But he remains unsure, since Faustus is not acting like a dying man—rather, he is out with scholars.

### ➤ Scene 12 Summary

*Sweet Helen, make me immortal with a kiss:*

*Her lips sucks forth my soul, see where it flies!*

*Come Helen, come, give me my soul again.*

*Here will I dwell, for heaven be in these lips,*

*And all is dross that is not Helena!*

- A scholar asks Faustus if he can produce Helen of Troy who was “the admirablest lady / that ever lived” (12.3–4).
- Faustus agrees to produce her, and gives the order to Mephistopheles: immediately, Helen crosses the stage.
- The scholars leave, an old man enters and tries to persuade Faustus to repent and appeal to God for mercy, saying, “I see an angel hovers o’er thy head / And with a vial full of precious grace / Offers to pour the same into thy soul!” (12.44–46).
- Once the old man leaves, Mephistopheles threatens to cut Faustus to pieces if he does not reconfirm his vow to Lucifer.
- Faustus complies, sealing his vow by once again stabbing his arm and inscribing

it in blood.

- He asks Mephistopheles to punish the old man for trying to dissuade him from continuing in Lucifer's service; Mephistopheles says that he cannot touch the old man's soul but that he will cut his body.
- Faustus then asks Mephistopheles to let him see Helen again. Helen enters, and Faustus makes a great speech about her beauty and kisses her.

### ➤ Scene 13 Summary

*Now hast thou but one bare hour to live,*

*And then thou must be damned perpetually.*

*Ugly hell gape not! Come not, Lucifer!*

*I'll burn my books—ah, Mephistopheles!*

- The final night of Faustus's life has come, and he tells the scholars of the deal he has made with Lucifer. They leave to pray for Faustus.
- A vision of hell opens before Faustus's horrified eyes as the clock strikes eleven.
- The last hour passes by quickly, and Faustus tries to stop the clocks, so that he might live a little longer and have a chance to repent.
- He then begs God to reduce his time in hell to a thousand years or a hundred thousand years, so long as he is eventually saved.
- He wishes that he were a beast and would simply cease to exist when he dies instead of damnation.
- He curses his parents and himself, and the clock strikes midnight.
- Devils enter and carry Faustus away as he screams, "Ugly hell gape not! Come not, Lucifer! / I'll burn my books—ah, Mephistopheles!" (13.112–113).

### ➤ Epilogue Summary

- The Chorus enters and warns the wise "only to wonder at unlawful things" and not to trade their souls for forbidden knowledge (Epilogue.6).

## Analysis: Chorus 4–Epilogue

- For the last time, Faustus regains his eloquence and tragic grandeur in the final scene, as his destiny approaches.
- However, Faustus maintains the same blind spots that lead him down his dark road in the first place.
- Earlier, he wanted transcendence through magic instead of religion.
- Now, he seeks it through female beauty, as he asks Helen to make him “immortal” by kissing him (12.83).
- If Helen too is just an illusion, then Faustus is wasting his last hours with a fantasy image, a symbol for his entire life.
- Faustus’s final speech is the most emotionally powerful scene in the play, as his mind rushes from idea to idea.
- One moment he is begging time to slow down, the next he is crying Christ for mercy. One moment he is crying out in fear and trying to hide from the wrath of God, the next he is begging to have the eternity of hell lessened somehow.
- He curses his parents for giving birth to him but then owns up to his responsibility and curses himself.
- With the gates of hell literally opening before Faustus, he still ignores all the warnings.
- Faustus’s loyalty to Lucifer could be because he is afraid of having his body torn apart by Mephistopheles.
- Faustus seems willing to reseal his vows in blood, and he even goes a step further when he demands that Mephistopheles punish the old man who urges him to repent.
- Marlowe suggests that Faustus’s self-delusion persists even at the end.
- Having served Lucifer for so long, he has reached a point at which he cannot imagine breaking free.
- In his final speech, Faustus is clearly ruined with remorse, yet he no longer seems to be able to repent.

- *Doctor Faustus* is a Christian tragedy, but the logic of the final scene is not Christian.

- In the following lines, Faustus appears to be calling on Christ:

*O, I'll leap up to my God! Who pulls me down?*

*One drop of blood would save my soul,*

*half a drop: ah my Christ (13.69–71)*

- The ending of *Doctor Faustus* represents a clash between Christianity, which holds that repentance and salvation are always possible, and the nature of tragedy, in which some character flaw cannot be corrected, even by appealing to God.

- To make *Doctor Faustus* a true tragedy, Marlowe had to set down a moment beyond which Faustus could no longer repent, so that in the final scene, while still alive, he can be damned and conscious of his damnation.

- The unhappy Faustus's last line returns us to the clash between Renaissance values and medieval values that dominates the early scenes.

## **Important Quotations Explained**

The reward of sin is death? That's hard.

Si peccasse negamus, fallimur, et nulla est in nobis veritas.

If we say that we have no sin,

We deceive ourselves, and there's no truth in us.

Why then belike we must sin,

And so consequently die.

Ay, we must die an everlasting death.

What doctrine call you this? Che sarà, sarà:

What will be, shall be! Divinity, adieu!

These metaphysics of magicians,

And necromantic books are heavenly! (1.40–50)

- Faustus speaks these lines near the end of his opening soliloquy. In this speech, he considers seeking the highest form of knowledge. Faustus ignores the possibility of redemption, just as he ignores it throughout the play. Faustus has blind spots; he sees what he wants to see rather than what is really there.



**MEPHASTOPHILIS:** Why this is hell, nor am I out of it.  
Think'st thou that I, who saw the face of God,  
And tasted the eternal joys of heaven,  
Am not tormented with ten thousand hells  
In being deprived of everlasting bliss?  
O Faustus, leave these frivolous demands,  
Which strike a terror to my fainting soul.  
**FAUSTUS:** What, is great Mephistophilis so passionate  
For being deprived of the joys of heaven?  
Learn thou of Faustus manly fortitude,  
And scorn those joys thou never shalt possess. (3.76–86)

- These lines show Faustus at his most willful blindness. Mephistopheles describe how awful hell is for him even as a devil, but he criticizes Mephistopheles's words, urging him to be a man." But the dialogue also shows Mephistopheles in a peculiar light: he is committed to Faustus's damnation while urging Faustus against selling his soul telling him to "leave these frivolous demands, / Which strike a terror to my fainting soul."
- There is a parallel between the experience of Mephistopheles and that of Faustus. Mephistopheles knows all too well the terrible reality, and this knowledge drives him, in spite of himself, to warn Faustus away from his terrible course.

**MEPHASTOPHILIS:**  
Hell hath no limits, nor is circumscribed  
In one self-place; for where we are is hell,  
And where hell is, there must we ever be.  
All places shall be hell that is not heaven.  
**FAUSTUS:**  
Come, I think hell's a fable.  
**MEPHASTO:**  
mind.  
**FAUSTUS:**  
Think'st thou that Faustus is so fond to imagine  
That after this life there is any pain?  
Tush, these are trifles and mere old wives' tales. (5.120–135)

- This dialogue shows Mephistopheles warning Faustus about the horrors of hell. Faustus is a secular Renaissance man, so he rejects traditional religion and believes hell to be a “fable” even when he is speaking to a devil.
- Faustus takes Mephistopheles’s assertion that hell will be “all places ... that is not heaven” to mean that hell will just be a continuation of life on earth.
- He fails to understand the difference between him and Mephistopheles: unlike Mephistopheles, who has lost heaven permanently, Faustus is not yet damned and still has the possibility of repentance.
- He cannot yet understand the torture against which Mephistopheles warns him and imagines that he already knows the worst of what hell will be.

Was this the face that launched a thousand ships,  
 And burnt the topless towers of Ilium?  
 Sweet Helen, make me immortal with a kiss:  
 Her lips suck forth my soul, see where it flies!  
 Come Helen, come, give me my soul again.  
 Here will I dwell, for heaven be in these lips,  
 And all is dross that is not Helena! (12.81–87)

- These lines come from a speech that Faustus makes at the end of his life and begins to realize the terrible nature of the pact he has made.
- While the speech marks a return to the eloquence that he shows early in the play, Faustus continues to display the same blind spots that characterize his character throughout the drama. Now, he looks for transcendence in a woman and seeks heavenly grace in Helen’s lips, which offer only earthly pleasure. He continues to keep his back turned to God.

Ah Faustus,  
Now hast thou but one bare hour to live,  
And then thou must be damned perpetually.

...

One drop would save my soul, half a drop: ah my Christ—  
Ah, rend not my heart for naming of my Christ;  
Yet will I call on him—O spare me, Lucifer!

...

O God, if thou wilt not have mercy on my soul,  
Let Faustus live in hell a thousand years,  
A hundred thousand, and at last be saved.  
Cursed be the parents that engendered me:  
No, Faustus, curse thy self, curse Lucifer,  
That hath deprived thee of the joys of heaven.  
My God, my God, look not so fierce on me!  
Ugly hell gape not! Come not, Lucifer!  
I'll burn my books—ah, Mephistopheles! (13.57–113)

- These lines come from Faustus's final speech, just before the devils take him down to hell.
- It is the most dramatic moment in the play. Faustus goes from one idea to another, desperately seeking a way out. But no escape is available, and he ends by reaching an understanding of his own guilt: "No, Faustus, curse thy self, curse Lucifer, / That hath deprived thee of the joys of heaven."
- Marlowe's play ultimately proves more tragic than Christian since there comes a point beyond which Faustus can no longer be saved.
- Faustus's last line expresses the play's representation of a clash between Renaissance and medieval values.

## Study Questions

### 1. Is *DOCTOR FAUSTUS* a Christian tragedy? Why or why not?

- *Doctor Faustus* has elements of both Christian morality and classical tragedy.
- On the one hand, there are devils and angels. The devils tempt people into sin and the angels urging them to remain true to God. Faustus's principal sin is his great pride and ambition, which can be contrasted with the Christian virtue of humility.
- On the other hand, in a traditional tragic play, the hero is brought down by an error or series of errors and realizes his or her mistake only when it is too late. However, in Christianity, as long as a person is alive, there is always the possibility of repentance. so, if a tragic hero realizes his or her mistake, he or she may still be saved even at the last moment.
- But though Faustus begs for forgiveness, he is carried off to hell.
- Marlowe rejects the Christian idea that it is never too late to repent in order to increase the dramatic power of his finale, in which Faustus is conscious of his damnation and yet, tragically, can do nothing about it.

### 2. Scholar R.M. Dawkins once called *Faustus* "a Renaissance man who had to pay the medieval price for being one." Do you think this is an accurate characterization of Marlowe's tragic hero?

- *Doctor Faustus* depicts a clash between the values of the medieval world and the emerging spirit of the Renaissance. In medieval Europe, Christianity and God lay at the center of intellectual life. In art and literature, the emphasis was on the lives of the saints rather than on those of ordinary people. With the advent of the Renaissance, however, there was a new celebration of the free individual and the scientific exploration of nature.
- Faustus embodies the secular spirit of the modern era. Marlowe symbolizes this spirit when Faustus rejects all the medieval authorities—Aristotle in logic, Galen in medicine, Justinian in law, and the Bible in religion.
- Yet, as the quote says, he "pay[s] the medieval price" for taking this new direction, since terrible fate awaits the Renaissance man who rejects God.

- But by investing Faustus with such tragic grandeur, Marlowe may be suggesting a different lesson. Perhaps the price of rejecting God is worth it, or perhaps Faustus pays the price for all of western culture, allowing it to enter a new, more secular era.

**3. Discuss the character of Mephistopheles. How much of a role does he play in Faustus's damnation? How does Marlowe complicate his character and inspire our sympathy?**

- Mephistopheles is part of a long tradition of literary devils. He seems to desire Faustus's damnation: he appears when Faustus rejects God. Yet, before the pact is sealed, he actually warns Faustus against making the deal, telling him how awful the pains of hell are.
- When Faustus denies any afterlife, Mephistopheles assures him that hell is real and terrible. These odd complications in Mephistopheles's character serve a twofold purpose. First, they highlight Faustus's willful blindness since he dismisses the warning of the very demon who would accomplish the deal. In this regard, his remark that hell is a myth seems delusional. At the same time, these devils may be villains, but they are tragic figures, separated forever from the bliss of God. Indeed, Mephistopheles and Faust are similar figures: both reject God out of pride, and both suffer for it eternally.

## Quiz

**1. In the Prologue, who introduces the story of Doctor Faustus?**

- A. The Chorus                      B. Faustus                      C. Mephistopheles                      D. Wagner

**2. To which Greek mythological character is Faustus compared in the Prologue?**

- A. Hercules                      B. Perseus                      C. Icarus                      D. Theseus

**3. What fields of learning does Faustus consider before he turns to magic?**

- A. Chemistry, biology, and physics  
B. Logic, medicine, law, and theology  
C. Navigation, astronomy, rhetoric, and theology  
D. Grammar, history, science, and Latin

**4. Which characters instruct Faustus in the dark arts?**

- A. The scholars  
B. Wagner and Robin  
C. The good and bad angels  
D. Cornelius and Valdes

**5. When he first summons Mephistopheles, how does Faustus ask him to appear?**

- A. In the shape of a Franciscan friar  
B. In the shape of a beautiful woman  
C. As a winged creature with horns  
D. As a handsome young man

**6. What is the name of the ruler of hell in Doctor Faustus?**

- A. Satan                      B. Mephistopheles                      C. Lucifer                      D. Belzebug

**7. How long does Faustus demand that Mephistophilis serve him?**

- A. Thirty years                      B. 24 years                      C. One hour                      D. A century

**8. What does Faustus offer in return for this service?**

- A. All his riches                      B. his child                      C. Nothing                      D. His soul

**9. How does Faustus sign his compact with Lucifer?**

- A. In his own blood                      B. In the blood of a virgin  
C. In ink produced in hell                      D. He doesn't

**10. What is the meaning of the words that appear on Faustus's arm in Latin?**

- A. "Satan's own"  
B. "Prince of Darkness"  
C. "Fly, man"  
D. "You are doomed"

**11. Who agrees, under duress, to become Wagner's servant?**

- A. Faustus      B. The clown      C. Belzebub      D. Helen of Troy

**12. What does Mephistophilis refuse to tell Faustus?**

- A. If Faustus will be damned  
B. How many planets there are  
C. Where hell is located  
D. Who made the world

**13. Why does Mephistophilis refuse to answer this question?**

- A. He says that the answer is "against our kingdom"  
B. He does not know the answer  
C. He thinks that the answer is too terrifying for Faustus to hear  
D. He thinks that God will strike him down if he answers the question

**14. Which city does Faustus visit extensively in scene 7?**

- A. Amsterdam      B. Berlin      C. Rome      D. Jerusalem

**15. What trick does Faustus, while invisible, play on the pope?**

- A. He makes a Bible burn in the pope's hands  
B. He exposes the pope's baldness  
C. He fools the pope into believing a statue is talking to him  
D. He steals dishes of food and disrupts the pope's banquet

**16. Which historical figure does Faustus conjure up for the emperor to see?**

- A. Helen of Troy      B. Jesus Christ      C. Joan of Arc      D. Alexander the Great

**17. Which character is publicly skeptical of Faustus's powers?**

- A. Charles V  
B. The knight (also known as Benvolio)  
C. The horse-courser  
D. The ostler

**18. How does Faustus humiliate this skeptic?**

- A. He turns his skin green  
B. He makes him unable to speak  
C. He makes antlers sprout from the skeptic's head  
D. He hypnotizes him and makes him strip naked

**19. Who tries to persuade Faustus to repent just before he reseals his pact with Lucifer?**

- A. An old man      B. Wagner      C. Mephistopheles      D. The knight

**20. What happens to the horse that Faustus sells to the horse-courser?**

- A. It turns into a dragon  
B. It dies immediately  
C. It lives a long and healthy life  
D. It turns into a heap of straw when it goes in the water

**21. What does the horse-courser think he is removing from Faustus's body after Faustus wakes?**

- A. His shirt      B. His leg      C. His cloak      D. His hand

**22. What does Faustus fetch for the Duchess of Vanholt?**

- A. A male slave      B. A griffin      C. A dish of grapes      D. A horse

**23. Where, according to Mephistophilis, is hell?**

- A. Everywhere that heaven is not  
B. Deep below the earth's surface      C. Inside Faustus's soul  
D. Directly beneath heaven

**24. What beauty does Mephistopheles present to Faustus in scene 12?**

- A. Joan of Arc  
B. Eleanor of Aquitaine  
C. Catherine the Great  
D. Helen of Troy

**25. What happens to Faustus at the end of the play?**

- A. He repents and is saved  
B. He kills himself  
C. He becomes emperor of Germany  
D. He is carried off to hell

Answer Key:

1: A; 2: C; 3: B; 4: D; 5: A; 6: C; 7: B; 8: D; 9: A; 10: C; 11: B; 12: D; 13: A; 14: C; 15: D;  
16: D; 17: B; 18: C;  
D; 25: D