

Doctor Faustus Summary

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Prologue—Chorus

At the beginning of the play, a character called the **Chorus** comes on stage. The Chorus is not a specific person in the story, but acts like a narrator. He gives an introduction to the audience. He tells the audience that the play is not about great kings, heroes, or knights. Instead, it is about the life and fate of one man, Doctor Faustus. This means the play will focus on Faustus's choices, success, and downfall. The Chorus tells that Faustus was born into a simple, poor family. He was very intelligent and talented, excelling in his studies. However, instead of using his knowledge wisely, he became interested in necromancy (magic and summoning spirits). This led to his downfall.

The Chorus says: ***"His waxen wings did mount above his reach,...***

For falling to a devilish exercise,...

He surfeits upon cursed necromancy."

The Chorus details how Faustus rose as an academic. He was also an expert on religion. But Faustus became prideful. He became obsessed with learning more and more. The Chorus compares Faustus to the Greek myth of Icarus (who flew too close to the sun, which melted his waxen wings, and he fell down to his death). The Chorus says Faustus flew too high, reaching above what is natural and normal, and then he fell, committing himself to the

"devilish exercise"

of necromancy. Faustus wanted too much power and ignored the dangers, which led to his downfall. The Prologue warns the audience that too much ambition can destroy a person.

Act 1, Scene 1—Faustus Chooses Magic

Doctor Faustus is alone in his study, thinking about what subject he should focus on. He looks at different subjects:

- Logic – He has already mastered it. It only helps in arguing, so it is not useful.

- Medicine – He can heal people, but he cannot bring the dead back to life. So he is not interested.
- Law – He finds it boring and too focused on money.
- Theology (Religion) – The Bible says that all people sin and will be punished. This makes him feel hopeless.

Since none of these subjects gives him enough power, he decides to study magic. Doctor Faustus says:

“Che sara, sara

What will be, shall be! Divinity, adieu!

These metaphysics of magicians,

And necromantic books are heavenly!”

Faustus says goodbye to religion. He believes that magic will make him all-powerful, rich, and famous. Faustus calls his servant,

Wagner

, and tells him to bring

Valdes

and

Cornelius

, two magicians who can teach him how to practice magic.

After Wagner leaves, two spirits appear.

“GOOD ANGEL. O, Faustus, lay that damned book aside,

And gaze not on it, lest it tempt thy soul,

And heap God’s heavy wrath upon thy head!

Read, read the Scriptures:—that is blasphemy.

EVIL ANGEL. Go forward, Faustus, in that famous art

Wherein all Nature's treasure is contain'd:

Be thou on earth as Jove is in the sky,

Lord and commander of these elements."

The Good Angel warns Faustus to stay away from magic and follow God. He tells Faustus to put the book of magic aside. He warns him not to look at those books, because those books can tempt him. And the heavy wrath of God can fall on him. The Good Angel tells Faustus to read the religious books. **The Evil Angel** tempts Faustus by power, wealth, and greatness. He says Faustus can become a powerful God on earth, just like Jove/Jupiter in the sky. Faustus ignores the warning of the Good Angel. He starts dreaming about ruling the world with magic. Doctor Faustus says:

***"Shall I make spirits fetch me what I please,
Resolve me of all ambiguities,
Perform what desperate enterprise I will?
I'll have them fly to India for gold,
Ransack the ocean for orient pearl,
And search all corners of the new-found world
For pleasant fruits and princely delicacies;
I'll have them read me strange philosophy,
And tell the secrets of all foreign kings;
I'll have them wall all Germany with brass,
And make swift Rhine circle fair Wertenberg"***

Faustus dreams about the great things he can do with magic. He wants to call spirits to bring him anything he wants. They will answer all his questions, find gold in India, pearls in the ocean, and fruits from around the world. He also wants them to teach him new ideas, tell him secrets of kings, and even build strong walls around Germany.

When Valdes and Cornelius arrive, they are happy to teach him magic. They tell Faustus that with his intelligence and their guidance, he will become a great magician. The three men plan to have dinner together, and then Faustus will begin learning magic.

Act 1, Scene 2 - The Scholars Worry About Faustus

Two scholars come looking for Faustus. They ask Wagner where he is, and Wagner jokingly teases them before telling them that Faustus is having dinner with Valdes and Cornelius. The scholars become very worried. They know that Valdes and Cornelius are magicians. They fear that Faustus is practicing black magic. They decide to tell the head of the university. They hope that someone can stop Faustus before it is too late.

Act 1, Scene 3 - Faustus Summons the Devil

One cold winter night, Faustus is alone in his study room. He is now confident in his magic skills and ready to summon a demon. Using a spell book, Faustus draws magic circles, writes strange words, and chants in Latin. Soon, a demon appears—his name is **Mephistophilis** (Also known as Mephistopheles). At first, Faustus does not like how Mephistophilis looks, so he tells him to change into a more pleasant form. Mephistophilis returns dressed as a friar, and Faustus is happy.

Faustus then orders Mephistophilis to serve him, but the demon refuses. He explains that he only serves **Lucifer** (Satan):

- ***"FAUSTUS. I charge thee wait upon me whilst I live,***

- ***To do whatever Faustus shall command,***

Be it to make the moon drop from her sphere,

Or the ocean to overwhelm the world.

MEPHIST. I am a servant to great Lucifer,

And may not follow thee without his leave:

No more than he commands must we perform."

Faustus tells Mephistophilis to serve him and obey all his commands, even if they are very powerful or impossible, like making the moon fall or flooding the world. But Mephistophilis replies that he cannot serve Faustus without Lucifer's permission. Because he is loyal to Lucifer and can only do what Lucifer allows.

Mephistophilis also warns Faustus that hell is real and full of pain, but Faustus does not listen. Instead, he tells Mephistophilis to ask Lucifer if he can sell his soul in exchange for power:

“FAUSTUS. Go bear these tidings to great Lucifer,...

Say, he surrenders up to him his soul

So he will spare him four and twenty years,

Letting him live in all voluptuousness,

Having thee ever to attend on me,

To give me whatsoever I ask,

To tell me whatsoever I demand,

To slay mine enemies, and aid my friends,

And always be obedient to my will.

Go and return to mighty Lucifer,

And meet me in my study at midnight,

And then resolve me of thy master's mind.

MEPHIST. I will, Faustus.

Faustus tells Mephistophilis to take a message to Lucifer. Faustus agrees to give his soul to Lucifer in exchange for 24 years of magical power and pleasure. During this time, he wants Mephistophilis to serve him, give him anything he asks for, answer all his questions, help his friends, and harm his enemies. He tells Mephistophilis to come back at midnight with Lucifer's answer. Mephistophilis agrees and leaves. After Mephistophilis leaves, Faustus dreams of ruling the world, moving mountains, and controlling nature.

FAUSTUS. Had I as many souls as there be stars,

I'd give them all for Mephistophilis.

By him I'll be great emperor of the world,

And make a bridge thorough the moving air,

To pass the ocean with a band of men;

Faustus says that if he had as many souls as there are stars in the sky, he would give them all to have Mephistophilis serve him. With Mephistophilis's help, he dreams of becoming the ruler of the whole world. He even imagines building a bridge in the air so that he can lead an army across the ocean.

Act 1, Scene 4 - Wagner Tricks a Clown

This is a comic scene. Wagner, Faustus's servant, meets **Clown** (a poor peasant). He teases and mocks him, calling him "boy." The clown argues back, saying that he is a grown man. Wagner tries to hire him as a servant, but the clown refuses. So, Wagner uses magic to scare him, making the clown think that devils will attack him. The clown gets frightened and agrees to work for Wagner.

Act 2, Scene 1 - Faustus Sells His Soul

Faustus is alone again, waiting for Mephistophilis. He starts to doubt his decision.

[Enter GOOD ANGEL and EVIL ANGEL.]

GOOD ANGEL. Sweet Faustus, leave that execrable art.

FAUSTUS. Contrition, prayer, repentance—what of them?

GOOD ANGEL. O, they are means to bring thee unto heaven!

*EVIL ANGEL. Rather illusions, fruits of lunacy,
That make men foolish that do trust them most.*

GOOD ANGEL. Sweet Faustus, think of heaven and heavenly things.

EVIL ANGEL. No, Faustus; think of honour and of wealth."]

The Good Angel appears and tells him it is not too late to repent. He tells him to leave the evil art of magic. But the Evil Angel tells him that he can still gain great power.

When Mephistophilis returns, he tells Faustus that Lucifer has agreed to the deal. Faustus will have 24 years of power, but after that, his soul will belong to Lucifer. Lucifer demands a written will. Faustus signs a contract in blood, but his blood suddenly stops flowing, as if his body is warning him to stop. Mephistophilis brings hot coals to make the blood flow again, and Faustus finishes signing the contract. At that moment, he sees a warning message appear on his arm: **"Homo, fuge!"** ("Man, run away!"). But he ignores it. Lucifer sends him gifts and a book of

spells to keep him entertained. Faustus is happy and forgets about his doubts.

Faustus also sets five conditions in the contract. Here are the conditions:

***“FIRST, THAT FAUSTUS MAY BE A SPIRIT IN FORM AND
SUBSTANCE. SECONDLY, THAT MEPHISTOPHILIS SHALL BE HIS SERVANT,
AND AT HIS COMMAND. THIRDLY, THAT MEPHISTOPHILIS SHALL DO FOR HIM,
AND BRING HIM WHATSOEVER HE DESIRES. FOURTHLY, THAT HE SHALL
BE IN HIS CHAMBER OR HOUSE INVISIBLE. LASTLY, THAT HE SHALL APPEAR
TO THE SAID JOHN FAUSTUS, AT ALL TIMES, IN WHAT FORM OR SHAPE
SOEVER HE PLEASE.”***

First, he wants to become a spirit in body and soul. Second, he wants Mephistophilis to be his servant and obey him. Third, Mephistophilis must bring him anything he wants. Fourth, Faustus wants Mephistophilis to be invisible in his house. Lastly, he wants Mephistophilis to appear to him anytime, in any shape or form he likes.

Act 2, Scene 2 - The Clown Robin Learns Magic

This is another comic scene. A stable worker named **Robin** has stolen one of Faustus's spell books. He wants to learn magic himself. His friend **Rafe** comes in and sees the book. Robin brags that with this book, he will become powerful. He says he will use magic to impress a girl. Rafe is interested and wants to learn magic too. They both plan to use spells for silly tricks.

Act 2, Scene 3 - Faustus Thinks About Repenting

Faustus is starting to regret his decision. He thinks about praying to God and asking for forgiveness.

***“When I behold the heavens, then I repent,
And curse thee, wicked Mephastophilis,
Because thou hast deprived me of those joys.”***

Faustus says that when he looks at the sky and thinks about heaven, he feels guilty for what he has done. He blames Mephistophilis for taking away his chance to go to heaven and enjoy its

happiness. At that moment, the Good Angel and Evil Angel appear again. The Good Angel tells Faustus that God will still forgive him if he repents. The Evil Angel tells him that it is too late to turn back.

“EVIL ANGEL. Too late.

GOOD ANGEL. Never too late, if Faustus can repent.

EVIL ANGEL. If thou repent, devils shall tear thee in pieces.

GOOD ANGEL. Repent, and they shall never raze thy skin.

FAUSTUS. Ah, Christ, my Saviour,

Seek to save distressed Faustus' soul!”

Seven Deadly Sins

Faustus begins to pray, but suddenly, Lucifer, Beelzebub, and Mephistophilis appear. Lucifer scares Faustus and tells him to stop thinking about God. He says it goes against their deal. To distract Faustus, Lucifer shows him a parade of the Seven Deadly Sins: Pride, Covetousness (Greed), Wrath, Envy, Gluttony, Sloth, and Lechery (Lust).

Pride introduces himself. He is too proud that he refuses to admit having parents. He boasts that he can do anything. Then he complains about the bad smell around him and refuses to speak more unless the ground is covered with perfume and fancy cloth.

Covetousness introduces himself and says he wishes he could turn the whole house and everyone in it into gold. He shows his deep love for gold, calling it ***“O, my sweet gold!”***

Wrath introduces himself and says he has no parents. He claims he jumped out of a lion's mouth when he was just half an hour old. Since then, he has been running around the world with his swords, even hurting himself when there's no one to fight. He says he was born in hell and warns that someone in the room might become his next victim.

Envy introduces himself and says he cannot read, so he wishes all books were burned. He always sees others eating and feels jealous. He wishes a famine would come and everyone would die so he could live alone and eat everything.

Gluttony introduces himself and says his parents are dead and left him nothing except a small portion of daily food—thirty meals a day and ten snacks, which he calls a little amount. He asks Faustus to invite him to supper. Faustus refuses, saying Gluttony would eat all the food.

Gluttony gets angry and curses him.

Sloth introduces himself and says he was born on a sunny spot where he has been lying ever since. He is upset that someone disturbed his rest. He asks Gluttony and Lechery to carry him back. He refuses to speak another word, even for a huge reward.

Then Faustus turns to the last one and asks who she is. **Lechery** answers that she prefers a little bit of raw meat over a lot of cooked fish. It hints she loves pleasure.

Faustus forgets about repenting and enjoys the show. Lucifer gives Faustus another magic book and tells him to think only about magic and the devil.

Act 3, Scene 1 - Faustus Plays Tricks on the Pope

Faustus and Mephistophilis travel around the world. They reach Rome, where Faustus wants to meet the **Pope**. Mephistophilis makes Faustus invisible, so he can cause trouble without being seen. Faustus steals food and drinks from the Pope's table. The Pope thinks a ghost is haunting him. Then, when the Pope tries to pray, Faustus slaps him! The Pope and his priests get scared and start chanting prayers. Faustus and Mephistophilis laugh and run away.

Act 3, Scene 2 - Robin and Rafe Summon Mephistophilis

Robin and Rafe, the two stable workers, are playing with Faustus's stolen spell book. They try to cast a magic spell. But they accidentally summon Mephistophilis! Mephistophilis is angry because he has traveled all the way from Constantinople (modern-day Turkey) just to see two foolish men playing with magic. As punishment, he turns Robin into an ape and Rafe into a dog.

Act 4, Scene 1, 2

The Court of Emperor Charles V: Faustus has become famous for his magic. He is invited to the court of the Roman Emperor **Carolus V (Charles V)**. The Emperor wants Faustus to prove his powers. He asks him to bring back Alexander the Great, the famous ruler of Greece. Faustus summons Alexander's spirit, and the Emperor is amazed. However, there is a rude knight, Benvolio, who does not believe in Faustus's magic. He makes fun of Faustus. As revenge, Faustus magically makes horns appear on the knight's head, embarrassing him. The Emperor laughs, but the knight is furious. Faustus later removes the horns.

Faustus and the Horse-courser: A horse-seller (Horse-Courser) comes looking for Faustus. He wants to buy a horse and offers 40 dollars. Faustus says he wants 50, but after some begging and with Mephistophilis's support, Faustus agrees to sell the horse for 40 dollars. Before leaving, Faustus warns the man, **"Ride him not into the water."** The man agrees and

leaves happily. Later, the Horse-Courser returns soaking wet and very upset. He did not listen to Faustus and rode the horse into a pond. The moment the horse touched the water, it disappeared and turned into hay! The man fell into the pond and almost drowned. He wants his money back. He finds Faustus sleeping and tries to wake him up. When Faustus does not respond, the man pulls his leg—and the leg comes off! Shocked and scared, he thinks he has hurt Faustus badly. Faustus pretends to be in great pain, shouting for help. Mephistophilis joins in, threatening to call the police. The frightened man begs for forgiveness and promises to give another 40 dollars if they let him go. He runs away in fear. Faustus laughs, as he was only pretending. His leg is fine, and he fooled the man. He now has the money—and the man only got a pile of hay instead of a real horse.

The Court of the Duke of Vanholt: The Duke and Duchess of Vanholt invite Faustus (and Mephistophilis) at court. Faustus asks the Duchess what he can conjure that would please her. The Duchess asks him to make a plate of grapes appear, since it is the middle of winter (and grapes are only available in the summer). Mephistophilis leaves and brings back grapes. The Duke is intrigued and asks Faustus how he procured grapes in the middle of winter. Faustus answers that when it is winter in Germany, it is summer in opposite parts of the globe. He sent ***“a swift spirit that I have”*** to bring the grapes from afar. Faustus encourages the Duchess to eat the grapes, and she says they are the best she's ever tasted. The Duke and Duchess promise to reward Faustus for his display of magic.

Act 5, Scene 1 - Faustus Summons Helen of Troy

Faustus now realizes that his time is running out. His friends, the scholars, visit him and ask him to show them some magic. They ask to see Helen of Troy, the most beautiful woman in history. Faustus summons her spirit, and the scholars are amazed by her beauty. After they leave, an old man enters and begs Faustus to repent. The old man tells Faustus that God is merciful and will forgive him. The old man says:

“Then call for mercy, and avoid despair.”

Faustus almost repents, but then Mephistophilis scares him by saying he will be torn to pieces if he betrays Lucifer. Faustus gets scared and chooses to stay loyal to Lucifer. To comfort himself, he asks Mephistophilis to bring back Helen, and he kisses her.

“FAUSTUS. One thing, good servant, let me crave of thee,

To glut the longing of my heart's desire:

*That I might have unto my paramour
That heavenly Helen which I saw of late,
Whose sweet embracings may extinguish clean
These thoughts that do dissuade me from my vow:
And keep mine oath I made to Lucifer."*

Seeing Helen, Faustus says:

*"Was this the face that launched a thousand ships
And burnt the topless towers of Ilium?"*

Faustus asks Mephistophilis for one last thing—to bring him the spirit of Helen of Troy. He wants to be with her because he believes her love will take away all his guilty thoughts. When Faustus sees Helen, he is amazed by her beauty and says the famous line:

"Was this the face that launched a thousand ships..."

It means her beauty once started the Trojan War.

Act 5, Scene 2—Faustus's Last Night

It is the last night of Faustus's life. He sits with his scholar friends, but he looks worried and afraid. The scholars ask what is wrong, and Faustus finally tells them the truth—he has sold his soul to the devil. The scholars are horrified and tell him to pray to God.

"Yet Faustus, look up to heaven; remember God's mercies are infinite."

The scholars remind Faustus that God's mercy is limitless. But Faustus believes it is too late:

"But Faustus' offense can ne'er be pardoned! The serpent that tempted Eve may be saved, but not Faustus."

Faustus believes that his sin is too great to be forgiven. He says even the serpent (Satan) who tempted Eve to eat the forbidden fruit might be saved, but he himself cannot be. This shows that Faustus feels hopeless and thinks he is beyond God's mercy. As the clock strikes eleven, he begins to panic. He begs time to stop, so that midnight never comes.

"Mountains and hills, come, come, and fall on me

And hide me from the heavy wrath of God!"

He cries out to God, hoping for mercy, but he can already feel hell pulling him down.

"O I'll leap up to my God! Who pulls me down?..."

One drop would save my soul, half a drop: ah my Christ."

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

I'll burn my books—ah, Mephistophilis!"

At midnight, thunder and lightning fill the sky. Demons appear and surround Faustus. Faustus screams for help, but it is too late. He begs for even a few more years, but the devils grab him. Faustus screams in terror as they drag him away to hell. When the scholars enter the room, they find no trace of him—only his torn clothes and body parts.

Epilogue—The Final Warning/Moral Lesson

The Chorus (narrator) comes back and gives a final message. Faustus was intelligent but too ambitious. He ignored the warnings and wasted his power. In the end, his greed led him to hell. The Chorus warns the audience that trying to gain too much power can lead to destruction. The play ends with the tragic downfall of Doctor Faustus.

"CHORUS. Cut is the branch that might have grown full straight,

And burned is Apollo's laurel-bough,...

To practice more than heavenly power permits."

The Chorus says that Faustus was like a branch that could have grown straight and strong, but it was cut off early. He had great potential, but he was destroyed. Apollo's laurel bough refers to the crown of laurel. The crown of laurel is a symbol of great honour, ability, and achievement. This laurel crown is now burned. This happened because Faustus tried to use powers that were meant only for God.