

## ELIZABETHAN RELIGIOUS BELIEFS

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Life in Elizabethan England could be cruel and hard. The poor often went hungry, disease was widespread, medical remedies often felt more like tortures, and many women died in childbirth. But through their beliefs, people found ways of making sense of their existence.

People in Elizabethan England were, in general, much more religious than people today. Almost everyone believed in God, and expected to go to heaven or hell after death. In *HAMLET*, Hamlet won't kill his stepfather, Claudius, while Claudius is praying because he doesn't want him to go to heaven.

At this time, England was a Protestant country -- it had broken away from the Catholic Church of Rome. This was part of the European movement called the Reformation, which had started with attacks on corruption in the Catholic Church and led to the founding of non-Catholic, or Protestant, churches.

As many wars were fought in the name of religion, all English Catholics were seen as potential traitors to their country and were forbidden to hold any public office.

Some Protestants, called Puritans, felt the Church in England hadn't gone far enough in its rejection of Catholicism. They wanted to "purify" the Church of its remaining Catholic elements, such as bishops and ceremonial robes. Puritans also had strict ideas about what was sinful, or could lead to sin: fine clothes, drinking, gambling, and going to see plays were all thought to pave the way to hell.