

Module 3: Exploring Good, Evil, and Noble Sacrifice

Topic 3 Content: "The Prologue" to *The Canterbury Tales* by Geoffrey Chaucer

1 When April with his showers sweet with fruit
2 The drought of March has pierced unto the root
3 And bathed each vein with liquor that has power
4 To generate therein and sire the flower;
5 When Zephyr also has, with his sweet breath,
6 Quickened again, in every holt and heath,
7 The tender shoots and buds, and the young sun
8 Into the Ram one half his course has run,
9 And many little birds make melody
10 That sleep through all the night with open eye
11 (So Nature pricks them on to ramp and rage)
12 Then do folk long to go on pilgrimage,
13 And palmers to go seeking out strange strands,
14 To distant shrines well known in sundry lands.
15 And specially from every shire's end
16 Of England they to Canterbury wend,
17 The holy blessed martyr there to seek
18 Who helped them when they lay so ill and weal
19 Befell that, in that season, on a day
20 In Southwark, at the Tabard, as I lay
21 Ready to start upon my pilgrimage
22 To Canterbury, full of devout homage,
23 There came at nightfall to that hostelry
24 Some nine and twenty in a company
25 Of sundry persons who had chanced to fall
26 In fellowship, and pilgrims were they all
27 That toward Canterbury town would ride.
28 The rooms and stables spacious were and wide,
29 And well we there were eased, and of the best.
30 And briefly, when the sun had gone to rest,
31 So had I spoken with them, every one,
32 That I was of their fellowship anon,
33 And made agreement that we'd early rise
34 To take the road, as you I will apprise.
35 But none the less, whilst I have time and space,
36 Before yet farther in this tale I pace,
37 It seems to me accordant with reason
38 To inform you of the state of every one
39 Of all of these, as it appeared to me,
40 And who they were, and what was their degree,
41 And even how arrayed there at the inn;
42 And with a knight thus will I first begin.

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43 A **knight** there was, and he a worthy man,
44 Who, from the moment that he first began
45 To ride about the world, loved chivalry,
46 Truth, honour, freedom and all courtesy.
47 Full worthy was he in his liege-lord's war,
48 And therein had he ridden (none more far)
49 As well in Christendom as heathenesse,
50 And honoured everywhere for worthiness.
51 At Alexandria, he, when it was won;
52 Full oft the table's roster he'd begun
53 Above all nations' knights in Prussia.
54 In Latvia raided he, and Russia,
55 No christened man so oft of his degree.
56 In far Granada at the siege was he
57 Of Algeciras, and in Belmarie.
58 At Ayas was he and at Satalye
59 When they were won; and on the Middle Sea
60 At many a noble meeting chanced to be.
61 Of mortal battles he had fought fifteen,
62 And he'd fought for our faith at Tramissene
63 Three times in lists, and each time slain his foe.
64 This self-same worthy knight had been also
65 At one time with the lord of Palatye
66 Against another heathen in Turkey:
67 And always won he sovereign fame for prize.
68 Though so illustrious, he was very wise
69 And bore himself as meekly as a maid.
70 He never yet had any vileness said,
71 In all his life, to whatsoever wight.
72 He was a truly perfect, gentle knight.
73 But now, to tell you all of his array,
74 His steeds were good, but yet he was not gay.
75 Of simple fustian wore he a jupon
76 Sadly discoloured by his habergeon;
77 For he had lately come from his voyage
78 And now was going on this pilgrimage.
79 With him there was his son, a youthful **squire**,
80 A lover and a lusty bachelor,
81 With locks well curled, as if they'd laid in press.
82 Some twenty years of age he was, I guess.
83 In stature he was of an average length,
84 Wondrously active, aye, and great of strength.

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85 He'd ridden sometime with the cavalry
86 In Flanders, in Artois, and Picardy,
87 And borne him well within that little space
88 In hope to win thereby his lady's grace.
89 Prinked out he was, as if he were a mead,
90 All full of fresh-cut flowers white and red.
91 Singing he was, or fluting, all the day;
92 He was as fresh as is the month of May.
93 Short was his gown, with sleeves both long and wide.
94 Well could he sit on horse, and fairly ride.
95 He could make songs and words thereto indite,
96 Joust, and dance too, as well as sketch and write.
97 So hot he loved that, while night told her tale,
98 He slept no more than does a nightingale.
99 Courteous he, and humble, willing and able,
100 And carved before his father at the table.
101 A **yeoman**¹ had he, nor more servants, no,
102 At that time, for he chose to travel so;
103 And he was clad in coat and hood of green.
104 A sheaf of peacock arrows bright and keen
105 Under his belt he bore right carefully
106 (Well could he keep his tackle yeomanly:
107 His arrows had no draggled feathers low),
108 And in his hand he bore a mighty bow.
109 A cropped head had he and a sun-browned face.
110 Of woodcraft knew he all the useful ways.
111 Upon his arm he bore a bracer gay,
112 And at one side a sword and buckler, yea,
113 And at the other side a dagger bright,
114 Well sheathed and sharp as spear point in the light;
115 On breast a Christopher of silver sheen.
116 He bore a horn in baldric all of green;
117 A forester he truly was, I guess.
118 There was also a nun, a **prioress**²,
119 Who, in her smiling, modest was and coy;
120 Her greatest oath was but By Saint Eloy!
121 And she was known as Madam Eglantine.
122 Full well she sang the services divine,
123 Intoning through her nose, becomingly;

¹ servant or attendant

² woman ranking just below an abbess, or head of a convent

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124 And fair she spoke her French, and fluently,
125 After the school of Stratford-at-the-Bow,
126 For French of Paris was not hers to know.
127 At table she had been well taught withal,
128 And never from her lips let morsels fall,
129 Nor dipped her fingers deep in sauce, but ate
130 With so much care the food upon her plate
131 That never driblet fell upon her breast.
132 In courtesy she had delight and zest.
133 Her upper lip was always wiped so clean
134 That in her cup was no iota seen
135 Of grease, when she had drunk her draught of wine.
136 Becomingly she reached for meat to dine.
137 And certainly delighting in good sport,
138 She was right pleasant, amiable—in short.
139 She was at pains to counterfeit the look
140 Of courtliness, and stately manners took,
141 And would be held worthy of reverence.
142 But, to say something of her moral sense,
143 She was so charitable and piteous
144 That she would weep if she but saw a mouse
145 Caught in a trap, though it were dead or bled.
146 She had some little dogs, too, that she fed
147 On roasted flesh, or milk and fine white bread.
148 But sore she'd weep if one of them were dead,
149 Or if men smote it with a rod to smart:
150 For pity ruled her, and her tender heart.
151 Right decorous her pleated wimple was;
152 Her nose was fine; her eyes were blue as glass;
153 Her mouth was small and therewith soft and red;
154 But certainly she had a fair forehead;
155 It was almost a full span broad, I own,
156 For, truth to tell, she was not undergrown.
157 Neat was her cloak, as I was well aware.
158 Of coral small about her arm she'd bear
159 A string of beads and gauded all with green;
160 And therefrom hung a brooch of golden sheen
161 Whereon there was first written a crowned A,
162 And under, *Amor vincit omnia*.
163 Another little **nun** with her had she,
164 Who was her chaplain; and of **priests** she'd three.
165 A **monk** there was, one made for mastery,

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166 An outrider, who loved his venery;
167 A manly man, to be an abbot able.
168 Full many a blooded horse had he in stable:
169 And when he rode men might his bridle hear
170 A-jingling in the whistling wind as clear,
171 Aye, and as loud as does the chapel bell
172 Where this brave monk was of the cell.
173 The rule of Maurus or Saint Benedict,
174 By reason it was old and somewhat strict,
175 This said monk let such old things slowly pace
176 And followed new-world manners in their place.
177 He cared not for that text a clean-plucked hen
178 Which holds that hunters are not holy men;
179 Nor that a monk, when he is cloisterless,
180 Is like unto a fish that's waterless;
181 That is to say, a monk out of his cloister.
182 But this same text he held not worth an oyster;
183 And I said his opinion was right good.
184 What? Should he study as a madman would
185 Upon a book in cloister cell? Or yet
186 Go labour with his hands and swink and sweat,
187 As Austin bids? How shall the world be served?
188 Let Austin have his toil to him reserved.
189 Therefore he was a rider day and night;
190 Greyhounds he had, as swift as bird in flight.
191 Since riding and the hunting of the hare
192 Were all his love, for no cost would he spare.
193 I saw his sleeves were purfled at the hand
194 With fur of grey, the finest in the land;
195 Also, to fasten hood beneath his chin,
196 He had of good wrought gold a curious pin:
197 A love-knot in the larger end there was.
198 His head was bald and shone like any glass,
199 And smooth as one anointed was his face.
200 Fat was this lord, he stood in goodly case.
201 His bulging eyes he rolled about, and hot
202 They gleamed and red, like fire beneath a pot;
203 His boots were soft; his horse of great estate.
204 Now certainly he was a fine prelate:
205 He was not pale as some poor wasted ghost.
206 A fat swan loved he best of any roast.
207 His palfrey was as brown as is a berry.

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208 A **friar** there was, a wanton and a merry,
209 A limiter, a very festive man.
210 In all the Orders Four is none that can
211 Equal his gossip and his fair language.
212 He had arranged full many a marriage
213 Of women young, and this at his own cost.
214 Unto his order he was a noble post.
215 Well liked by all and intimate was he
216 With franklins everywhere in his country,
217 And with the worthy women of the town:
218 For at confessing he'd more power in gown
219 (As he himself said) than it good curate,
220 For of his order he was licentiate.
221 He heard confession gently, it was said,
222 Gently absolved too, leaving naught of dread.
223 He was an easy man to give penance
224 When knowing he should gain a good pittance;
225 For to a begging friar, money given
226 Is sign that any man has been well shriven.
227 For if one gave (he dared to boast of this),
228 He took the man's repentance not amiss.
229 For many a man there is so hard of heart
230 He cannot weep however pains may smart.
231 Therefore, instead of weeping and of prayer,
232 Men should give silver to poor friars all bare.
233 His tippet was stuck always full of knives
234 And pins, to give to young and pleasing wives.
235 And certainly he kept a merry note:
236 Well could he sing and play upon the rote.
237 At balladry he bore the prize away.
238 His throat was white as lily of the May;
239 Yet strong he was as ever champion.
240 In towns he knew the taverns, every one,
241 And every good host and each barmaid too,
242 Better than begging lepers, these he knew.
243 For unto no such solid man as he
244 Accorded it, as far as he could see,
245 To have sick lepers for acquaintances.
246 There is no honest advantageousness
247 In dealing with such poverty-stricken curs;
248 It's with the rich and with big victuallers.
249 And so, wherever profit might arise,

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250 Courteous he was and humble in men's eyes.
251 There was no other man so virtuous.
252 He was the finest beggar of his house;
253 A certain district being farmed to him,
254 None of his brethren dared approach its rim;
255 For though a widow had no shoes to show,
256 So pleasant was his In principio,
257 He always got a farthing ere he went.
258 He lived by pickings, it is evident.
259 And he could romp as well as any whelp.
260 On love days could he be of mickle help.
261 For there he was not like a cloisterer,
262 With threadbare cope as is the poor scholar,
263 But he was like a lord or like a pope.
264 Of double worsted was his semi-cope,
265 That rounded like a bell, as you may guess.
266 He lisped a little, out of wantonness,
267 To make his English soft upon his tongue;
268 And in his harping, after he had sung,
269 His two eyes twinkled in his head as bright
270 As do the stars within the frosty night.
271 This worthy limiter was named Hubert.
272 There was a **merchant** with forked beard, and girt
273 In motley gown, and high on horse he sat,
274 Upon his head a Flemish beaver hat;
275 His boots were fastened rather elegantly.
276 His spoke his notions out right pompously,
277 Stressing the times when he had won, not lost.
278 He would the sea were held at any cost
279 Across from Middleburgh to Orwell town.
280 At money-changing he could make a crown.
281 This worthy man kept all his wits well set;
282 There was no one could say he was in debt,
283 So well he governed all his trade affairs
284 With bargains and with borrowings and with shares.
285 Indeed, he was a worthy man withal,
286 But, sooth to say, his name I can't recall.
287 A **clerk from Oxford** was with us also,
288 Who'd turned to getting knowledge, long ago.
289 As meagre was his horse as is a rake,
290 Nor he himself too fat, I'll undertake,
291 But he looked hollow and went soberly.

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292 Right threadbare was his overcoat; for he
293 Had got him yet no churchly benefice,
294 Nor was so worldly as to gain office.
295 For he would rather have at his bed's head
296 Some twenty books, all bound in black and red,
297 Of Aristotle and his philosophy
298 Than rich robes, fiddle, or gay psaltery.
299 Yet, and for all he was philosopher,
300 He had but little gold within his coffer;
301 But all that he might borrow from a friend
302 On books and learning he would swiftly spend,
303 And then he'd pray right busily for the souls
304 Of those who gave him wherewithal for schools.
305 Of study took he utmost care and heed.
306 Not one word spoke he more than was his need;
307 And that was said in fullest reverence
308 And short and quick and full of high good sense.
309 Pregnant of moral virtue was his speech;
310 And gladly would he learn and gladly teach.
311 A **sergeant of the law**, wary and wise,
312 Who'd often gone to Paul's walk to advise,
313 There was also, compact of excellence.
314 Discreet he was, and of great reverence;
315 At least he seemed so, his words were so wise.
316 Often he sat as justice in assize,
317 By patent or commission from the crown;
318 Because of learning and his high renown,
319 He took large fees and many robes could own.
320 So great a purchaser was never known.
321 All was fee simple to him, in effect,
322 Wherefore his claims could never be suspect.
323 Nowhere a man so busy of his class,
324 And yet he seemed much busier than he was.
325 All cases and all judgments could he cite
326 That from King William's time were apposite.
327 And he could draw a contract so explicit
328 Not any man could fault therefrom elicit;
329 And every statute he'd verbatim quote.
330 He rode but badly in a medley coat,
331 Belted in a silken sash, with little bars,
332 But of his dress no more particulars.

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333 There was a **franklin**³ in his company;
334 White was his beard as is the white daisy.
335 Of sanguine temperament by every sign,
336 He loved right well his morning sop in wine.
337 Delightful living was the goal he'd won,
338 For he was Epicurus' very son,
339 That held opinion that a full delight
340 Was true felicity, perfect and right.
341 A householder, and that a great, was he;
342 Saint Julian he was in his own country.
343 His bread and ale were always right well done;
344 A man with better cellars there was none.
345 Baked meat was never wanting in his house,
346 Of fish and flesh, and that so plenteous
347 It seemed to snow therein both food and drink
348 Of every dainty that a man could think.
349 According to the season of the year
350 He changed his diet and his means of cheer.
351 Full many a fattened partridge did he mew,
352 And many a bream and pike in fish-pond too.
353 Woe to his cook, except the sauces were
354 Poignant and sharp, and ready all his gear.
355 His table, waiting in his hall alway,
356 Stood ready covered through the livelong day.
357 At county sessions was he lord and sire,
358 And often acted as a knight of shire.
359 A dagger and a trinket-bag of silk
360 Hung from his girdle, white as morning milk.
361 He had been sheriff and been auditor;
362 And nowhere was a worthier vavasor.
363 A **haberdasher**⁴ and a **carpenter**,
364 An **arras-maker**⁵, **dyer**, and **weaver**
365 Were with us, clothed in similar livery,
366 All of one sober, great fraternity.
367 Their gear was new and well adorned it was;
368 Their weapons were not cheaply trimmed with brass,
369 But all with silver; chastely made and well
370 Their girdles and their pouches too, I tell.
371 Each man of them appeared a proper burges

³ wealthy landowner not of noble birth

⁴ merchant who sells small wares

⁵ tapestry-maker

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372 To sit in guildhall on a high dais.
373 And each of them, for wisdom he could span,
374 Was fitted to have been an alderman;
375 For chattels they'd enough, and, too, of rent;
376 To which their goodwives gave a free assent,
377 Or else for certain they had been to blame.
378 It's good to hear Madam before one's name,
379 And go to church when all the world may see,
380 Having one's mantle borne right royally.
381 A **cook** they had with them, just for the nonce,
382 To boil the chickens with the marrow-bones,
383 And flavour tartly and with galingale.
384 Well could he tell a draught of London ale.
385 And he could roast and seethe and broil and fry,
386 And make a good thick soup, and bake a pie.
387 But very ill it was, it seemed to me,
388 That on his shin a deadly sore had he;
389 For sweet blanc-mange, he made it with the best.
390 There was a **sailor**, living far out west;
391 For aught I know, he was of Dartmouth town.
392 He sadly rode a hackney, in a gown,
393 Of thick rough cloth falling to the knee.
394 A dagger hanging on a cord had he
395 About his neck, and under arm, and down.
396 The summer's heat had burned his visage brown;
397 And certainly he was a good fellow.
398 Full many a draught of wine he'd drawn, I trow,
399 Of Bordeaux vintage, while the trader slept.
400 Nice conscience was a thing he never kept.
401 If that he fought and got the upper hand,
402 By water he sent them home to every land.
403 But as for craft, to reckon well his tides,
404 His currents and the dangerous watersides,
405 His harbours, and his moon, his pilotage,
406 There was none such from Hull to far Carthage.
407 Hardy. and wise in all things undertaken,
408 By many a tempest had his beard been shaken.
409 He knew well all the havens, as they were,
410 From Gottland to the Cape of Finisterre,
411 And every creek in Brittany and Spain;
412 His vessel had been christened *Madeleine*.
413 With us there was a **doctor** of physic;

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414 In all this world was none like him to pick
415 For talk of medicine and surgery;
416 For he was grounded in astronomy.
417 He often kept a patient from the pall
418 By horoscopes and magic natural.
419 Well could he tell the fortune ascendent
420 Within the houses for his sick patient.
421 He knew the cause of every malady,
422 Were it of hot or cold, of moist or dry,
423 And where engendered, and of what humour;
424 He was a very good practitioner.
425 The cause being known, down to the deepest root,
426 Anon he gave to the sick man his boot.
427 Ready he was, with his apothecaries,
428 To send him drugs and all electuaries;
429 By mutual aid much gold they'd always won.
430 Their friendship was a thing not new begun.
431 Well read was he in Esculapius,
432 And Deiscorides, and in Rufus,
433 Hippocrates, and Hali, and Galen,
434 Serapion, Rhazes, and Avicen,
435 Averrhoes, Gilbert, and Constantine,
436 Bernard and Gatisden, and John Damascene.
437 In diet he was measured as could be,
438 Including naught of superfluity,
439 But nourishing and easy. It's no libel
440 To say he read but little in the Bible.
441 In blue and scarlet he went clad, withal,
442 Lined with a taffeta and with sendal;
443 And yet he was right chary of expense;
444 He kept the gold he gained from pestilence.
445 For gold in physic is a fine cordial,
446 And therefore loved he gold exceeding all.
447 There was a **housewife come from Bath**, or near,
448 Who—sad to say—was deaf in either ear.
449 At making cloth she had so great a bent
450 She bettered those of Ypres and even of Ghent.
451 In all the parish there was no goodwife
452 Should offering make before her, on my life;
453 And if one did, indeed, so wroth was she
454 It put her out of all her charity.
455 Her kerchiefs were of finest weave and ground;

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456 I dare swear that they weighed a full ten pound
457 Which, of a Sunday, she wore on her head.
458 Her hose were of the choicest scarlet red,
459 Close gartered, and her shoes were soft and new.
460 Bold was her face, and fair, and red of hue.
461 She'd been respectable throughout her life,
462 With five churched husbands bringing joy and strife,
463 Not counting other company in youth;
464 But thereof there's no need to speak, in truth.
465 Three times she'd journeyed to Jerusalem;
466 And many a foreign stream she'd had to stem;
467 At Rome she'd been, and she'd been in Boulogne,
468 In Spain at Santiago, and at Cologne.
469 She could tell much of wandering by the way:
470 Gap-toothed was she, it is no lie to say.
471 Upon an ambler easily she sat,
472 Well wimpled, aye, and over all a hat
473 As broad as is a buckler or a targe;
474 A rug was tucked around her buttocks large,
475 And on her feet a pair of sharpened spurs.
476 In company well could she laugh her slurs.
477 The remedies of love she knew, perchance,
478 For of that art she'd learned the old, old dance.
479 There was a good man of religion, too,
480 A country **parson**⁶, poor, I warrant you;
481 But rich he was in holy thought and work.
482 He was a learned man also, a clerk,
483 Who Christ's own gospel truly sought to preach;
484 Devoutly his parishioners would he teach.
485 Benign he was and wondrous diligent,
486 Patient in adverse times and well content,
487 As he was oftentimes proven; always blithe,
488 He was right loath to curse to get a tithe,
489 But rather would he give, in case of doubt,
490 Unto those poor parishioners about,
491 Part of his income, even of his goods.
492 Enough with little, coloured all his moods.
493 Wide was his parish, houses far asunder,
494 But never did he fail, for rain or thunder,
495 In sickness, or in sin, or any state,

⁶ member of the clergy

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496 To visit to the farthest, small and great,
497 Going afoot, and in his hand, a stave.
498 This fine example to his flock he gave,
499 That first he wrought and afterwards he taught;
500 Out of the gospel then that text he caught,
501 And this figure he added thereunto
502 That, if gold rust, what shall poor iron do?
503 For if the priest be foul, in whom we trust,
504 What wonder if a layman yield to lust?
505 And shame it is, if priest take thought for keep,
506 A shitty shepherd, shepherding clean sheep.
507 Well ought a priest example good to give,
508 By his own cleanness, how his flock should live.
509 He never let his benefice for hire,
510 Leaving his flock to flounder in the mire,
511 And ran to London, up to old Saint Paul's
512 To get himself a chantry there for souls,
513 Nor in some brotherhood did he withhold;
514 But dwelt at home and kept so well the fold
515 That never wolf could make his plans miscarry;
516 He was a shepherd and not mercenary.
517 And holy though he was, and virtuous,
518 To sinners he was not impiteous,
519 Nor haughty in his speech, nor too divine,
520 But in all teaching prudent and benign.
521 To lead folk into Heaven but by stress
522 Of good example was his busyness.
523 But if some sinful one proved obstinate,
524 Be who it might, of high or low estate,
525 Him he reproved, and sharply, as I know.
526 There is nowhere a better priest, I trow.
527 He had no thirst for pomp or reverence,
528 Nor made himself a special, spiced conscience,
529 But Christ's own lore, and His apostles' twelve
530 He taught, but first he followed it himselfe.
531 With him there was a **plowman**, was his brother,
532 That many a load of dung, and many another
533 Had scattered, for a good true toiler, he,
534 Living in peace and perfect charity.
535 He loved God most, and that with his whole heart
536 At all times, though he played or plied his art,
537 And next, his neighbour, even as himself.

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538 He'd thresh and dig, with never thought of pelf,
539 For Christ's own sake, for every poor wight,
540 All without pay, if it lay in his might.
541 He paid his taxes, fully, fairly, well,
542 Both by his own toil and by stuff he'd sell.
543 In a tabard he rode upon a mare.
544 There were also a **reeve**⁷ and **miller** there;
545 A **summoner**⁸, **manciple**⁹ and **pardon**¹⁰,
546 And these, beside myself, made all there were.
547 The **miller** was a stout churl, be it known,
548 Hardy and big of brawn and big of bone;
549 Which was well proved, for when he went on lam
550 At wrestling, never failed he of the ram.
551 He was a chunky fellow, broad of build;
552 He'd heave a door from hinges if he willed,
553 Or break it through, by running, with his head.
554 His beard, as any sow or fox, was red,
555 And broad it was as if it were a spade.
556 Upon the coping of his nose he had
557 A wart, and thereon stood a tuft of hairs,
558 Red as the bristles in an old sow's ears;
559 His nostrils they were black and very wide.
560 A sword and buckler bore he by his side.
561 His mouth was like a furnace door for size.
562 He was a jester and could poetize,
563 But mostly all of sin and ribaldries.
564 He could steal corn and full thrice charge his fees;
565 And yet he had a thumb of gold, begad.
566 A white coat and blue hood he wore, this lad.
567 A bagpipe he could blow well, be it known,
568 And with that same he brought us out of town.
569 There was a **manciple** from an inn of court,
570 To whom all buyers might quite well resort
571 To learn the art of buying food and drink;
572 For whether he paid cash or not, I think
573 That he so knew the markets, when to buy,
574 He never found himself left high and dry.
575 Now is it not of God a full fair grace

⁷ administrator of an estate

⁸ person who summons people to Church court

⁹ official or administrator charged with buying provisions for an institution

¹⁰ seller of Church pardons

Module 3: Exploring Good, Evil, and Noble Sacrifice

Topic 3 Content: "The Prologue" to *The Canterbury Tales* by Geoffrey Chaucer

576 That such a vulgar man has wit to pace
577 The wisdom of a crowd of learned men?
578 Of masters had he more than three times ten,
579 Who were in law expert and curious;
580 Whereof there were a dozen in that house
581 Fit to be stewards of both rent and land
582 Of any lord in England who would stand
583 Upon his own and live in manner good,
584 In honour, debtless (save his head were wood),
585 Or live as frugally as he might desire;
586 These men were able to have helped a shire
587 In any case that ever might befall;
588 And yet this manciple outguessed them all.
589 The **reeve** he was a slender, choleric man
590 Who shaved his beard as close as razor can.
591 His hair was cut round even with his ears;
592 His top was tonsured like a pulpiteer's.
593 Long were his legs, and they were very lean,
594 And like a staff, with no calf to be seen.
595 Well could he manage granary and bin;
596 No auditor could ever on him win.
597 He could foretell, by drought and by the rain,
598 The yielding of his seed and of his grain.
599 His lord's sheep and his oxen and his dairy,
600 His swine and horses, all his stores, his poultry,
601 Were wholly in this steward's managing;
602 And, by agreement, he'd made reckoning
603 Since his young lord of age was twenty years;
604 Yet no man ever found him in arrears.
605 There was no agent, hind, or herd who'd cheat
606 But he knew well his cunning and deceit;
607 They were afraid of him as of the death.
608 His cottage was a good one, on a heath;
609 By green trees shaded with this dwelling-place.
610 Much better than his lord could he purchase.
611 Right rich he was in his own private right,
612 Seeing he'd pleased his lord, by day or night,
613 By giving him, or lending, of his goods,
614 And so got thanked—but yet got coats and hoods.
615 In youth he'd learned a good trade, and had been
616 A carpenter, as fine as could be seen.
617 This steward sat a horse that well could trot,

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Topic 3 Content: "The Prologue" to *The Canterbury Tales* by Geoffrey Chaucer

618 And was all dapple-grey, and was named Scot.
619 A long surcoat of blue did he parade,
620 And at his side he bore a rusty blade.
621 Of Norfolk was this reeve of whom I tell,
622 From near a town that men call Badeswell.
623 Bundled he was like friar from chin to croup,
624 And ever he rode hindmost of our troop.
625 A **summoner** was with us in that place,
626 Who had a fiery-red, cherubic face,
627 For eczema he had; his eyes were narrow
628 As hot he was, and lecherous, as a sparrow;
629 With black and scabby brows and scanty beard;
630 He had a face that little children feared.
631 There was no mercury, sulphur, or litharge,
632 No borax, ceruse, tartar, could discharge,
633 Nor ointment that could cleanse enough, or bite,
634 To free him of his boils and pimples white,
635 Nor of the bosses resting on his cheeks.
636 Well loved he garlic, onions, aye and leeks,
637 And drinking of strong wine as red as blood.
638 Then would he talk and shout as madman would.
639 And when a deal of wine he'd poured within,
640 Then would. he utter no word save Latin.
641 Some phrases had he learned, say two or three,
642 Which he had garnered out of some decree;
643 No wonder, for he'd heard it all the day;
644 And all you know right well that even a jay
645 Can call out Wat as well as can the pope.
646 But when, for aught else, into him you'd grope,
647 'Twas found he'd spent his whole philosophy;
648 Just *Questio quid juris* would he cry.
649 He was a noble rascal, and a kind;
650 A better comrade 'twould be hard to find.
651 Why, he would suffer, for a quart of wine,
652 Some good fellow to have his concubine
653 A twelve-month, and excuse him to the full
654 (Between ourselves, though, he could pluck a gull).
655 And if he chanced upon a good fellow,
656 He would instruct him never to have awe,
657 In such a case, of the archdeacon's curse,
658 Except a man's soul lie within his purse;
659 For in his purse the man should punished be.

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Topic 3 Content: "The Prologue" to *The Canterbury Tales* by Geoffrey Chaucer

660 The purse is the archdeacon's Hell, said he.
661 But well I know he lied in what he said;
662 A curse ought every guilty man to dread
663 (For curse can kill, as absolution save),
664 And 'ware significavit to the grave.
665 In his own power had he, and at ease,
666 The boys and girls of all the diocese,
667 And knew their secrets, and by counsel led.
668 A garland had he set upon his head,
669 Large as a tavern's wine-bush on a stake;
670 A buckler had he made of bread they bake.
671 With him there rode a gentle **pardoner**
672 Of Rouncival, his friend and his compeer;
673 Straight from the court of Rome had journeyed he.
674 Loudly he sang Come hither, love, to me,
675 The summoner joining with a burden round;
676 Was never horn of half so great a sound.
677 This pardoner had hair as yellow as wax,
678 But lank it hung as does a strike of flax;
679 In wisps hung down such locks as he'd on head,
680 And with them he his shoulders overspread;
681 But thin they dropped, and stringy, one by one.
682 But as to hood, for sport of it, he'd none,
683 Though it was packed in wallet all the while.
684 It seemed to him he went in latest style,
685 Dishevelled, save for cap, his head all bare.
686 As shiny eyes he had as has a hare.
687 He had a fine veronica sewed to cap.
688 His wallet lay before him in his lap,
689 Stuffed full of pardons brought from Rome all hot.
690 A voice he had that bleated like a goat.
691 No beard had he, nor ever should he have,
692 For smooth his face as he'd just had a shave;
693 I think he was a gelding or a mare.
694 But in his craft, from Berwick unto Ware,
695 Was no such pardoner in any place.
696 For in his bag he had a pillowcase
697 The which, he said, was Our True Lady's veil:
698 He said he had a piece of the very sail
699 That good Saint Peter had, what time he went
700 Upon the sea, till Jesus changed his bent.
701 He had a latten cross set full of stones,

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Topic 3 Content: "The Prologue" to *The Canterbury Tales* by Geoffrey Chaucer

702 And in a bottle had he some pig's bones.
703 But with these relics, when he came upon
704 Some simple parson, then this paragon
705 In that one day more money stood to gain
706 Than the poor dupe in two months could attain.
707 And thus, with flattery and suchlike japes,
708 He made the parson and the rest his apes.
709 But yet, to tell the whole truth at the last,
710 He was, in church, a fine ecclesiast.
711 Well could he read a lesson or a story,
712 But best of all he sang an offertory;
713 For well he knew that when that song was sung,
714 Then might he preach, and all with polished tongue.
715 To win some silver, as he right well could;
716 Therefore he sang so merrily and so loud.
717 Now have I told you briefly, in a clause,
718 The state, the array, the number, and the cause
719 Of the assembling of this company
720 In Southwark, at this noble hostelry
721 Known as the Tabard Inn, hard by the Bell.
722 But now the time is come wherein to tell
723 How all we bore ourselves that very night
724 When at the hostelry we did alight.
725 And afterward the story I engage
726 To tell you of our common pilgrimage.
727 But first, I pray you, of your courtesy,
728 You'll not ascribe it to vulgarity
729 Though I speak plainly of this matter here,
730 Retailing you their words and means of cheer;
731 Nor though I use their very terms, nor lie.
732 For this thing do you know as well as I:
733 When one repeats a tale told by a man,
734 He must report, as nearly as he can,
735 Every least word, if he remember it,
736 However rude it be, or how unfit;
737 Or else he may be telling what's untrue,
738 Embellishing and fictionizing too.
739 He may not spare, although it were his brother;
740 He must as well say one word as another.
741 Christ spoke right broadly out, in holy writ,
742 And, you know well, there's nothing low in it.
743 And Plato says, to those able to read:

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Topic 3 Content: "The Prologue" to *The Canterbury Tales* by Geoffrey Chaucer

744 The word should be the cousin to the deed.
745 Also, I pray that you'll forgive it me
746 If I have not set folk, in their degree
747 Here in this tale, by rank as they should stand.
748 My wits are not the best, you'll understand.
749 Great cheer our **host** gave to us, every one,
750 And to the supper set us all anon;
751 And served us then with victuals of the best.
752 Strong was the wine and pleasant to each guest.
753 A seemly man our good host was, withal,
754 Fit to have been a marshal in some hall;
755 He was a large man, with protruding eyes,
756 As fine a burgher as in Cheapside lies;
757 Bold in his speech, and wise, and right well taught,
758 And as to manhood, lacking there in naught.
759 Also, he was a very merry man,
760 And after meat, at playing he began,
761 Speaking of mirth among some other things,
762 When all of us had paid our reckonings;
763 And saying thus: Now masters, verily
764 You are all welcome here, and heartily:
765 For by my truth, and telling you no lie,
766 I have not seen, this year, a company
767 Here in this inn, fitter for sport than now.
768 Fain would I make you happy, knew I how.
769 And of a game have I this moment thought
770 To give you joy, and it shall cost you naught.
771 You go to Canterbury; may God speed
772 And the blest martyr soon requite your meed.
773 And well I know, as you go on your way,
774 You'll tell good tales and shape yourselves to play;
775 For truly there's no mirth nor comfort, none,
776 Riding the roads as dumb as is a stone;
777 And therefore will I furnish you a sport,
778 As I just said, to give you some comfort.
779 And if you like it, all, by one assent,
780 And will be ruled by me, of my judgment,
781 And will so do as I'll proceed to say,
782 Tomorrow, when you ride upon your way,
783 Then, by my father's spirit, who is dead,
784 If you're not gay, I'll give you up my head.
785 Hold up your hands, nor more about it speak.

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Topic 3 Content: "The Prologue" to *The Canterbury Tales* by Geoffrey Chaucer

786 Our full assenting was not far to seek;
787 We thought there was no reason to think twice,
788 And granted him his way without advice,
789 And bade him tell his verdict just and wise,
790 Masters, quoth he, here now is my advice;
791 But take it not, I pray you, in disdain;
792 This is the point, to put it short and plain,
793 That each of you, beguiling the long day,
794 Shall tell two stories as you wend your way
795 To Canterbury town; and each of you
796 On coming home, shall tell another two,
797 All of adventures he has known befall.
798 And he who plays his part the best of all,
799 That is to say, who tells upon the road
800 Tales of best sense, in most amusing mode,
801 Shall have a supper at the others' cost
802 Here in this room and sitting by this post,
803 When we come back again from Canterbury.
804 And now, the more to warrant you'll be merry,
805 I will myself, and gladly, with you ride
806 At my own cost, and I will be your guide.
807 But whosoever shall my rule gainsay
808 Shall pay for all that's bought along the way.
809 And if you are agreed that it be so,
810 Tell me at once, or if not, tell me no,
811 And I will act accordingly. No more.
812 This thing was granted, and our oaths we swore,
813 With right glad hearts, and prayed of him, also,
814 That he would take the office, nor forgo
815 The place of governor of all of us,
816 Judging our tales; and by his wisdom thus
817 Arrange that supper at a certain price,
818 We to be ruled, each one, by his advice
819 In things both great and small; by one assent,
820 We stood committed to his government.
821 And thereupon, the wine was fetched anon;
822 We drank, and then to rest went every one,
823 And that without a longer tarrying.
824 Next morning, when the day began to spring,
825 Up rose our host, and acting as our cock,
826 He gathered us together in a flock,
827 And forth we rode, a jog-trot being the pace,

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Topic 3 Content: "The Prologue" to *The Canterbury Tales* by Geoffrey Chaucer

828 Until we reached Saint Thomas' watering-place.
829 And there our host pulled horse up to a walk,
830 And said: Now, masters, listen while I talk.
831 You know what you agreed at set of sun.
832 If even-song and morning-song are one,
833 Let's here decide who first shall tell a tale.
834 And as I hope to drink more wine and ale,
835 Whoso proves rebel to my government
836 Shall pay for all that by the way is spent.
837 Come now, draw cuts, before we farther win,
838 And he that draws the shortest shall begin.
839 Sir knight, said he, my master and my lord,
840 You shall draw first as you have pledged your word.
841 Come near, quoth he, my lady prioress:
842 And you, sir clerk, put by your bashfulness,
843 Nor ponder more; out hands, flow, every man!
844 At once to draw a cut each one began,
845 And, to make short the matter, as it was,
846 Whether by chance or whatsoever cause,
847 The truth is, that the cut fell to the knight,
848 At which right happy then was every wight.
849 Thus that his story first of all he'd tell,
850 According to the compact, it befell,
851 As you have heard. Why argue to and fro?
852 And when this good man saw that it was so,
853 Being a wise man and obedient
854 To plighted word, given by free assent,
855 He slid: Since I must then begin the game,
856 Why, welcome be the cut, and in God's name!
857 Now let us ride, and hearken what I say.
858 And at that word we rode forth on our way;
859 And he began to speak, with right good cheer,
860 His tale anon, as it is written here.