Background of the Poem "The General Prologue to the Canterbury Tales"

Writer: Geoffrey Chaucer | Generated: Jan 26, 2026

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The late 14th century in England was a time of great change. After the Black Death, many people began questioning the Catholic Church's authority. Groups like the Lollards opposed the Church's control. Society was traditionally divided into three groups: the Church, nobility, and peasants. However, this system was collapsing. Peasant revolts spread like the 1381 Jack Straw rebellion. A new middle class of educated workers, such as merchants and clerks, was rising, especially in cities.

Chaucer was part of this class and satirized these changing times in "The Canterbury Tales." Chaucer planned to write 120 stories. He finished 23, and one was partially finished, of which 22 were verse tales, and 2 were prose tales. However, the rest remain unfinished because of Geoffrey Chaucer's sudden death.

If "The Canterbury Tales" is a book, "The General Prologue" is the first chapter of this book. Chaucer draws a framework for this work in "The General Prologue."

🔖 **Important Issue:** There are **30 pilgrims**, including Chaucer. This is made clear by the lines 20, 24, 25, and 26. Chaucer mentions **31 characters** in "The General Prologue." He describes the inn's owner at the end of the character list. It is made clear that the owner of the inn becomes The Host of the pilgrims. His proposal clears that he becomes the pilgrims' guide and organizes the journey. His role is not like other pilgrims in the group. (Important names are given from both Original Text and Modern English.)