

# Theology

by Sophia



## WHAT'S COVERED

I'm not sure exactly what your progression is along this study of religions pathway, but theology is bound to show up at some point in one way or another. Looking back historically, theology has been around as long as the human mind, heart, and soul have been preoccupied with understanding the nature and existence of God. Theology is a formal approach that reaches back through history and the languages that have given expression to these questions. Specifically, this lesson will cover:

1. Theology
2. Theology in the Middle Ages
3. Maimonides
4. Saint Thomas Aquinas
5. Avicenna

## 1. Theology

Let's begin with language. **Theology** comes from two Greek words: "theos," meaning "God," and "logos," which is difficult to define. In ancient Greece, the philosophers and theologians had many interpretations of it, and this influenced the religions that emerged in and around the region. Philo of Alexandria, for example, had a very developed doctrine of the logos. This doctrine referred to the logos as God, the word of God, God's action, and the mediator between man and God.

Theology then is really the perfect word to use to get into the study of God. The language and the history around it are really rich, varied, and inspiring. As a formal discipline of study, it's different from the phenomenology of religion, because it works with the questions related to the underlying reality of the unseen. It seeks answers to these questions often in a way that demands more involvement with faith.

As we have discussed in other lessons, the age-old preoccupation with these questions related to the unseen has guided the development of human thought and religious expression. Theology in a general sense refers to this process. As a modern discipline, theology continues to explore and search for answers to the big questions, whether they are from within a religious tradition or from without.



### Theology

The study of God, including questions regarding God's existence, nature, and character.

---

## 2. Theology in the Middle Ages

During the European Enlightenment, the coupling of theology with formal academics began to be questioned and brought into debate. This continues to the present day.

The basis for the arguments has to do with the question of impartiality and partiality with regard to studying theology; questions such as, "Are the investigations objective?" and "Is commitment of faith necessary when studying theology, and if so, does it get in the way of what's being studied?"

Because of its strong link with Greek philosophy, theology is mainly associated with the three monotheistic religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. However, it can also be used in certain ways to refer to other philosophies, religions, and approaches to the unseen that seek to answer some of the same fundamental questions.

Theology was thriving during the Middle Ages, and it was nearly inseparable from the study of other subjects. It was considered to be the pinnacle of academics, and for that reason, it was given the name "The Queen of the Sciences."

---

## 3. Maimonides

Moses ben Maimon, or Maimonides, was a hugely influential Jewish medieval philosopher, theologian, and physician from the 12th century. He sought to integrate Greek philosophy and rationalism with his own Judaic tradition. He applied it to the study of the Torah, the Hebrew Bible.

Maimonides was known for many works, especially the Mishneh Torah, or the repetition of the Torah, which is a codification or coding, of Jewish religious law and observances. He also wrote a philosophical text called *Guide for the Perplexed*.

---

## 4. Saint Thomas Aquinas

A little bit later, Saint Thomas Aquinas came on the scene to energize Roman Catholic thought. The method that he used is referred to as scholasticism. Like Maimonides, Aquinas put a lot of work into trying to harmonize and reconcile Hellenistic Greek philosophy with his Roman Catholic faith.

Aquinas's principal text is called the *Summa Theologica*, and Aquinas's foundational concept in the *Summa* involves Aristotle's notion of the prime mover, or the first unmoved mover. He used this metaphysical idea of motion to argue for God's existence; it is known as the proof of God's existence from motion.

## 5. Avicenna

A lot of the scholasticism of Maimonides and Aquinas can be traced back to a medieval Muslim theologian named Ibn Sina, or Avicenna, from the early 11th century. Avicenna was a philosopher and metaphysician who wrote volumes on the nature of being in existence, the existence of God and his creatures, and the relationship between a necessary and contingent being, or dependent existence.



### SUMMARY

The word **theology** comes from two Greek words: “theos,” meaning “God,” and “logos,” which has many interpretations. Theology deals with the questions related to the underlying reality of the unseen. It is most often associated with the three monotheistic religions of the West: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. **Theology in the Middle Ages** gave rise to modern theology by asking questions of partiality. The three medieval theologian philosophers you looked at today were Ibn Sina, or **Avicenna**, **Maimonides**, and **Saint Thomas Aquinas**. Although they come from different traditions, they shared an approach that was new at the time, giving rise to a chain of influence. Their approach to theology included a rigorous examination of Greek philosophy and metaphysics, integrating it with their respective religions.

Source: THIS TUTORIAL WAS AUTHORED BY TED FAIRCHILD FOR SOPHIA LEARNING. Please see our [Terms of Use](#).



### TERMS TO KNOW

#### Theology

The study of God, including questions regarding God's existence, nature, and character.