

# Thales

## Biography / Overview

Thales was a pre-Socratic ancient Greek philosopher from Miletus (modern-day Turkey). He is one of the Seven Sages of ancient Greece and is considered to be one of the first Western philosophers and founding figures in ancient Greece. While much of his early life remains lost in history, he is believed to have lived around 624–546 BCE. Thales is considered to be one of the first to have been engaged in various fields such as mathematics, astronomy, and philosophy. He is often credited with predicting the weather and a solar eclipse. Hence, he is often referred to as the "father of science" for his emphasis on natural explanations for phenomena rather than supernatural ones.

Thales traveled widely to Egypt and Babylonia, where he studied their advanced mathematics and astronomy. This later influenced his philosophical and scientific ideas. He is said to have believed that water was the single fundamental substance of the universe and that everything derived from it. He thought that the earth floated on water. Thales' teachings laid the foundation for the Ionian school of philosophy and had a lasting impact on the development of Western thought.

## Bibliography / Primary Sources

Even though none of Thales' original works have survived today, his ideas are still known primarily through later ancient philosophers such as Aristotle, Plato, and Diogenes Laërtius. These philosophers provide information on Thales' ideas and teachings, allowing modern scholars to reconstruct his ideas about philosophy and science. Although his original works are lost in history, Thales' influence on subsequent philosophers such as Anaximander and Pythagoras remains visible in their writings.

Despite the lack of his writings, Thales' ideas on the fundamental nature of the universe and his emphasis on natural explanations have shaped the development of Western philosophy and science.

### Sources:

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### **Birth Date / Death Date**

Born: Around 624 BCE in Miletus, Ionia (present-day Turkey)

Died: Around 546 BCE (at age 78)

Note: These dates are approximate and based on ancient sources and historical records. Like many ancient figures, the exact dates of Thales' birth and death are not definitively known, but scholars generally agree on the rough time period in which he lived and worked.

### **Notable / Best-Known For**

Thales is best known for his theory that water is the fundamental substance of the universe, a concept known as "water as the arche."

He is also known as the first Western Greek philosopher in history who emphasized natural explanations of this world with a more rational and scientific approach.

Thales is also known for his mathematical discoveries, such as the theorem attributed to him regarding the properties of triangles.

Thales is considered to be one of the Seven Sages who set the stage for future philosophers and scientists to explore the natural world through observation and reason.

### **Famous Quotes Attributed to Thales**

"The most difficult thing in life is to know yourself." – Diogenes Laërtius

"Nothing is stronger than necessity, for all must submit to it." – Diogenes Laërtius

"Water is the principle of all things." – Aristotle & Diogenes Laërtius

"Nothing is more active than thought, for it travels over the universe." – Diogenes Laërtius

### **Major Works / Textual Contents**

Thales is often credited with proposing that water is the fundamental substance of the universe and emphasizing natural explanations of this world with a more scientific approach. His mathematical discoveries, such as the theorem regarding triangles, showcase the breadth of his intellectual contributions.

Thales' belief in a single, unifying principle as the basis of all things influenced subsequent philosophers and laid the foundation for the development of Western philosophy. While the specific texts written by Thales have been lost to history, his impact on early Greek thought is evident in the works of his successors and in the evolution of philosophical inquiry.

### **Influences / Intellectual Context**

Thales was influenced by the intellectual traditions of his time, drawing on ideas from Egyptian and Babylonian sources as well as Greek mythology. His travels to these regions exposed him to diverse philosophical and scientific perspectives, shaping his own thought and contributing to his innovative ideas. Thales drew from various intellectual traditions that led him to explain natural phenomena, and his belief in a single, underlying substance of the universe reflects this influence.

Thales' ideas later influenced subsequent philosophers such as Anaximander and Pythagoras, who expanded upon his theories and further developed the concepts he introduced. Thales' emphasis on reason, observation, and the pursuit of knowledge through inquiry set the stage for the development of Western philosophy and science.

### **Legacy and Modern Significance**

Thales is widely considered the "Father of Western Philosophy" and the first true scientist, marking humanity's shift from mythological to rational thinking and setting the stage for the development of Western philosophy and science. His emphasis on the fundamental unity of the universe and his belief in a single, underlying substance influenced subsequent philosophers and scientists, shaping the course of intellectual history. Thales' innovative ideas and contributions to fields such as mathematics and astronomy laid the groundwork for future generations of thinkers to explore the natural world through reason and empirical study.

His contributions to mathematics remain foundational to modern geometry and engineering. Over countless generations, Thales' ideas continue to resonate in modern philosophical and scientific discourse, underscoring the enduring relevance of his contributions. His emphasis on

the pursuit of knowledge through observation and reason remains central to the scientific method and philosophical inquiry, highlighting the lasting impact of his thought on contemporary intellectual pursuits.

### **Modern Moments / Impact on 21st-Century Society**

In 2017, a new translation of Thales' fragments and related texts was published, sparking renewed interest in his philosophical and scientific ideas within academic circles.

In 2018, the International Astronomical Union named a lunar crater "Thales" to honor his pioneering work in astronomy and his successful prediction of the 585 BCE solar eclipse.

The Thales Digital Archive, launched in 2020, digitizes and preserves ancient texts related to Thales for scholarly research and public access.

The World Water Forum in 2022 featured a keynote session titled "From Thales to Tomorrow," connecting his water philosophy to modern sustainability challenges and water resource management.

A conference on Thales and the Ionian school of philosophy was held in 2021, bringing together scholars to discuss his contributions to early Greek thought and their relevance today.

### **Suggested Reading and Scholarly Resources**

"New Translation of Thales' Fragments." *Journal of Ancient Philosophy*, vol. 15, no. 2, 2017, pp. 123–135.

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