



# The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion

*James George Frazer*

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**The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion** James George Frazer

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The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion is a wide-ranging, comparative study of mythology and religion, written by the Scottish anthropologist Sir James George Frazer (1854–1941). It was first published in two volumes in 1890; in three volumes in 1900; the third edition, published 1906–15, comprised twelve volumes. The work was aimed at a wide literate audience raised on tales as told in such publications as Thomas Bulfinch's *The Age of Fable, or Stories of Gods and Heroes* (1855).

Frazer offered a modernist approach to discussing religion, treating it dispassionately as a cultural phenomenon rather than from a theological perspective. The influence of *The Golden Bough* on contemporary European literature and thought was substantial.

The Golden Bough attempts to define the shared elements of religious belief to scientific thought, discussing fertility rites, human sacrifice, the dying god, the scapegoat and many other symbols and practices whose influence has extended into twentieth-century culture. Its thesis is that old religions were fertility cults that revolved around the worship and periodic sacrifice of a sacred king. Frazer proposed that mankind progresses from magic through religious belief to scientific thought.

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