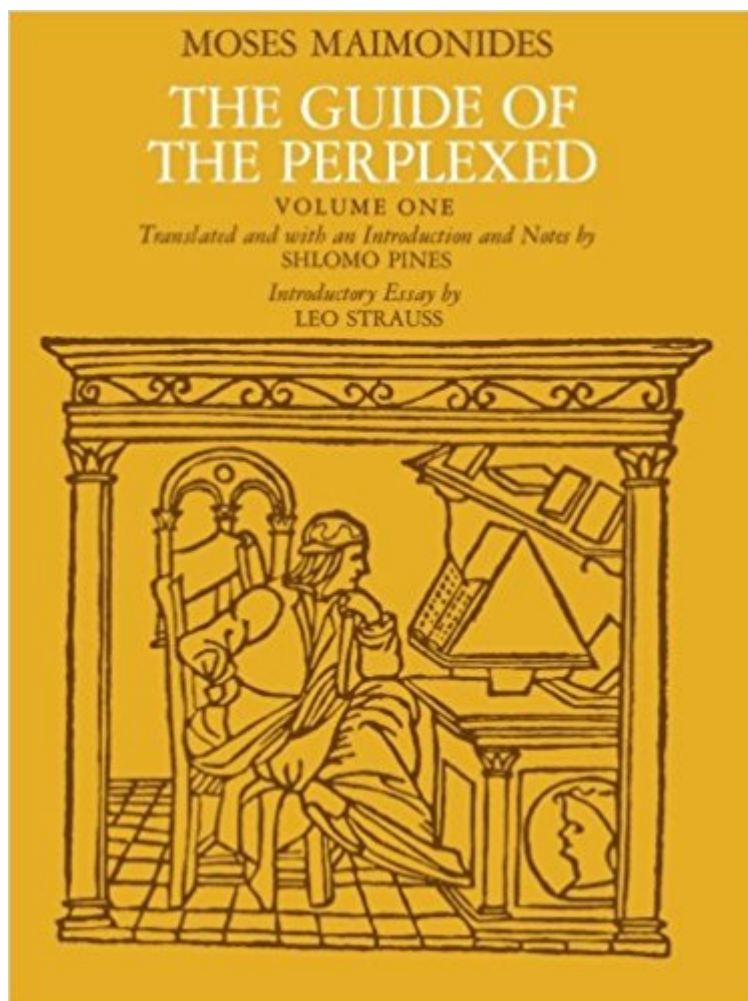


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The Guide Of The Perplexed, Vol. 1



Synopsis

This monument of rabbinical exegesis written at the end of the twelfth century has exerted an immense and continuing influence upon Jewish thought. Its aim is to liberate people from the tormenting perplexities arising from their understanding of the Bible according only to its literal meaning. This edition contains extensive introductions by Shlomo Pines and Leo Strauss, a leading authority on Maimonides.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This is volume one of a two volume set, so be sure to get both volumes. Volume one contains two interpretive essays, one by Leo Strauss and one by the translator, the former alone making this translation worthy of purchase, according to the Times Literary Supplement. Maimonides' work itself is an intentionally tangled web of reason, and casual readers will likely leave disappointed with its obscure style. Maimonides assumes a great deal of Scriptural knowledge and a familiarity with the most important commentators of his time. Nevertheless, for those willing to put in the effort both in learning the fundamentals of religion and in exploring an almost endless maze of logic, Maimonides will sketch the outlines of his view of philosophy and faith.

I have purchased other translations of this seminal work by the great rabbi and philosopher, Maimonides and found the text difficult to follow at times. The two volume edition is a welcome improvement as the translation makes the content easier to connect with and understand and therefore more enjoyable to explore. The thoughts and ideas behind the words are very deep and numerous sources are referenced by Maimonides including Greek philosophers so this is not an

easy read by any stretch. The wisdom and depth of the author is vast and so I found myself re-reading portions of the text each time gaining additional insights. If you want to explore the wisdom of Maimonides, pay the extra fee for this translation as it is well worth it.

The appreciation of the book will depend greatly on your level of comfort with the rabbinical view. If you seek a philosophical approach you might be better off with Aristotle and modern science, and if you are interested in rabbinical exegesis then go to the source and study the Talmud and other works. Maimonides possesses immense authority and is distanced from us by many centuries. He gives invaluable insight into certain issues but at the same time creates or entrenches other fundamental perplexities open to debate or critique. The introduction will serve the reader well especially on the author's contemporaries. Buy both volumes as the second and the third part of total three parts of the Guide are in the second volume. Igor Karpov, Toronto, Canada igorkarpov@rogers.com

There is no translation of Maimonides' Guide which compares to this, and, although Pines is known to side more with the Strausian school, his views are rarely if at all worked into this translation. For Maimonidian studies, this is a must buy.

There are two prominent English translations of Maimonides' classic book on philosophy. Friedlander, the earlier translator, called the book "Guide for the Perplexed." Pines, the more recent translator, called it "Guide of the Perplexed." Some people enjoy the first translation better than the second because it is more readable, but scholars prefer the second claiming that it is more precise. I have written previously about the Guide itself. Here I will note that Leo Strauss wrote an important introduction placed in this volume that people should know. He points out, what many readers of Maimonides fail to grasp, that Maimonides did not express his true views openly. Like most ancient philosophers, including Plato who called this the "noble lie," he wrote for two audiences. He felt that the general public would see their own false notions in his writing, while the more intellectual readers would be able to mine the surface of his writings and discover his true views. He didn't do this to hide these secrets from his fellow Jews, nor out of fear of reprisals. But exposing the general population to these truths could only lead to perplexity in the best of circumstances or to falling away from observance in the worst of circumstances, neither of which Maimonides had any interest in promoting. Thus, for example, while Maimonides wrote thirteen principles of Judaism for the general population, he expected that his more astute readers would realize that only the first five, which deal with God, should be accepted as Maimonides' true

opinions. For instance, while he wrote in the remaining eight that "the dead will live again," as item thirteen, he did believe in resurrection as most people thought, but that human intelligence will survive the body's death, as he writes in his work called *Chelek*.

Maimonides' "Guide of the Perplexed" is often regarded as a great Jewish book, but it is certainly worthy of a much wider audience. In the "Guide" Maimonides deals with some of the oldest problems which confront a Biblical or Koranic faith. Most importantly he deals with the problem that the faith at some points deviates from a rational view or what we might call a scientific view. This book is a masterful work worthy of a very careful reading. One finds in the work a whole range of possible skeptical conclusions which might have fallen from the pen of some clever modern atheist, but the possibilities are dealt with as alternatives which are, more than anything else, simply not edifying. This is a profound spiritual and philosophic work which can bring enlightenment to anyone willing to learn from a superior mind. The Pines translation is excellent and Strauss's introduction is useful. I will add that the serious student of this work might also find Strauss's work "Persecution and the Art of Writing," and his essays on exoteric or esoteric writing, useful. The esoteric writing thesis is developed by Strauss from the study of Maimonides, and it is likely that no work ever written lends itself more readily to such reading. Maimonides "Guide" is a profound work without peer among the great classic religious works that establish the basic beliefs of the Western religions. It has had profound effects on my view of reality. Give it a try, you might benefit more than you would reasonably expect. Enjoy. Timothy E. Kennelly

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