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tithe  (tīth)

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n.

1.

a. A portion of one's annual income contributed voluntarily or due as a tax, especially a contribution of one tenth of one's income for the support of the clergy or church.

b. The institution or obligation of paying tithes.

2. A tax or assessment of one tenth.

3.

a. A tenth part.

b. A very small part.

v. **tithed, tith-ing, tithes**

v.tr.

1. To pay (a portion of one's income) as a tithe.

2. To levy a tithe on.

v.intr.

To pay a tithe.

[Middle English, tithe consisting of a tenth part of one's goods or income, from Old English *tēoþa*, tenth, tithe; see **dek** [in the Appendix of Indo-European roots](#).]

tith a·ble (tī thə-bəl) *adj.*

tith er *n.*

Word History: A tithe is a tenth, etymologically speaking; in fact, *tithe* is the old ordinal numeral in English. Sound changes in the prehistory of English are responsible for its looking so different from the word *ten*. *Tithe* goes back to a prehistoric West Germanic form **tehuntha-*, formed from the cardinal numeral **tehun*, "ten," and the same ordinal suffix that survives in Modern English as *-th*. The *n* disappeared before the *th* in the West Germanic dialect area that gave rise to English, and eventually yielded the Old English form *tēoþe*, "tenth," still not too different from the cardinal numeral *tīen*. But over time, as the former became *tithe* and the latter *ten*, and as *tithe* developed the specialized meaning "a tenth part paid as a tax," it grew harder to perceive a relationship between the two. The result was that speakers of English created a new word for the ordinal, *tenth*, built with the cardinal numeral *ten* on the pattern of the other regularly formed ordinal numerals like *sixth* or *seventh*.

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Thousands of entries in the dictionary include etymologies that trace their origins back to reconstructed proto-languages. You can obtain more information about these forms in our online appendices:

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The Indo-European appendix covers nearly half of the Indo-European roots that have left their mark on English words. A more complete treatment of Indo-European roots and the English words derived from them is available in our [Dictionary of Indo-European Roots](#).

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