



Introduction

What Is Judaism? A Brief Summary

Judaism originated in the Middle East over 3500 years ago and is the original, or first, of the three Abrahamic faiths, which also include **Christianity** and **Islam**. The three share a common origin that flows from a biblical figure known as **Abraham**, the worship of the God of Abraham, and the practices of the ancient Israelites. However, Abraham's role and place in each faith is different. In Judaism, he is the founder of the Covenant, the special relationship between the Jewish people and God. In Christianity, he is the model for all believers, Jewish or not. In Islam, he is seen as being one link in a chain of prophets that began with Adam and culminated in Muhammad.

Jews believe that Abraham discovered that there was one God, thus introducing the concept of monotheism. This established an individual covenant (bond, special relationship) with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and their families to further spiritual teachings that would be later identified with Jewish religious tradition.

This individual covenant became a national covenant, when the Jewish collectively received the *Torah* at Mount Sinai. According to Jewish tradition and history, this occurred after Moses led the Jewish people to freedom from slavery in Egypt. (Source: Multifaith Information Manual)

Some key aspects of Jewish faith include the following:

- Jews believe that there is only one God, with whom they have a covenant.
- As God chose to reveal the *Torah* and righteous values and practices, Jewish people choose to keep God's laws and try to bring holiness into every aspect of their lives.
- Judaism has a rich history of religious texts, but the central and most important religious document is the *Torah* which is also called the *Pentateuch* or the Five Books of Moses.
- *Halakhah* is all of Jewish law and derives from three sources: the *Written Torah* which is the interpretations/discussions of the scholars/*rabbis* (*Gemara*); the oral laws or traditions (*Mishnah*); and, together, the *Gemara* and the *Mishnah* which comprise the *Talmud*.

- The original name for the people we now call Jews was Hebrews. The word Hebrew is first used in the Bible to describe Abraham (Gen. 14:13). Another name used for the people is Children of Israel or Israelites, which refers to the fact that the people are descendants of Jacob, who was also called Israel.
- The word Jew comes from the name of an ancient kingdom centered in Jerusalem, in the 2nd century BCE called *Judah* or *Yehudah* (its Hebrew name). The name of the kingdom derived from the name of Jacob's fourth son, Judah. Judah was the ancestor of one of the tribes of Israel, which was named after him. Likewise, the word Judaism literally means Judah-ism.
- In common speech, the word Jew is used to refer to all of the descendants of Jacob/Israel, as well as to the patriarchs Abraham and Isaac and their wives, and to adherents of Judaism, the religion. Judaism is used to refer to their beliefs or religious tradition.
- Judaism is considered to be a religion, as well as a nation and culture.
- Some people may identify as being a Jew (descendants of Jews) because of a sense of shared ethnicity and historical experience, but may not follow the Jewish faith.
- Spiritual leaders are called *rabbis*.
- Jews pray three times per day (morning, afternoon, and evening) and may pray anywhere.
- Jews gather for communal religious worship and instruction in buildings usually called synagogues (some use the term temple).
- The Jewish people are diverse in ethnicities and nationalities. The historical home of the Jews is situated at the geographic crossroads of Africa, Asia, and Europe. Modern Jews are a composite of many peoples and Jewish origins include a multitude of languages, nations, tribes, and physical characteristics such as skin tone. Throughout time, Hebrew peoples have had long and deep connections with Mediterranean, European, Asian, and African cultures. That history, along with more recent immigration to Israel, has made Israel one of the most racially, ethnically, and nationally diverse countries in the world, with immigrants from over 70 countries. **Ashkenazi** Jews are those who live or are descendants of Jews who lived in Eastern Europe. **Sephardic** Jews are descended from the Jews who lived in the Iberian Peninsula in the late 15th century. **Mizrahi** Jews are those that live or lived in the Arab world.



Figure 1: Star of David

- The practices and beliefs held by Jews are diverse and range from those who openly identify as Orthodox and strictly observe ancient precepts to those that are secular or unaffiliated Jews.
- Contemporary Judaism may be categorized as having evolved from four major movements: Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, and Reconstructionist. These Jewish movements have different interpretations of the *Torah*, which have led to different rituals, spiritual practices, and beliefs. The Conservative and Reform movements are particularly strong in North America, but have yet to make significant inroads in Israel, where orthodoxy remains the strongest movement.
- This diversity of beliefs and practices has led to different definitions and interpretations when asking, “Who is a Jew?”. This question is not just philosophical; it has political and legal ramifications. In Israel, questions of Jewish status have implications for immigration, conversion, marriage, divorce, and the allocation of government programs and supports.
- According to Jewish law, a child born to a Jewish mother or an adult who has converted to Judaism is to be considered a Jew. However, according to Reform Judaism, a person is a Jew if they were born to either a Jewish mother or a Jewish father. As well, Reform Judaism stresses the importance of being raised Jewish. According to the Orthodox movement, the father’s religion and whether the person practices is not relevant: as long as the mother was Jewish, the person will be considered to be a Jew.
- The concept and importance of, and the connection to a Jewish ‘homeland’, the land of Israel, is deeply embedded in the history, religion, and culture of the Jewish peoples. It begins with Abraham and with God asking Abraham to leave his homeland at that time and promising him and his descendants a new home in the land of Canaan. It also includes the forced exile and dispersal of Jews from Israel and Judah shortly after the war with Rome in 135 CE and the centuries of persecution, mass killings, and genocide that followed in Europe and other places where they sought asylum. It continues with the re-establishment of Israel in 1948 and the modern State of Israel today.
- Many Israelis are often described as secular, but the majority observe Jewish holidays and are very knowledgeable about Jewish history and culture, which is taught in public schools.
- Worldwide, approximately 13.6 million people identify as Jewish, with the vast majority living in either the United States or Israel. Judaism is flourishing in Israel and throughout the world. Canada has the 4th largest Jewish population. (Landau)

Judaism in Canada and the World

Regional Distribution of Jews

Population by region as of 2010



Percentage of world Jewish population in each region as of 2010



Population estimates are rounded to the ten thousands. Percentages are calculated from unrounded numbers. Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.
 Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life • Global Religious Landscape, December 2012

Map 1: Jewish Population by Country

“Unlike most immigrants to Canada, Jews did not come from a place where they were the majority cultural group. Jews were internationally dispersed at the time of the ancient Roman Empire and after unsuccessful revolts against it lost their sovereignty in their ancient homeland. Subsequently Jews lived, sometimes for many centuries, as minorities in the Middle East, North Africa and Europe.”

Canadian Encyclopedia

www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/jewish-canadians/

Judaism in Canada

As with many other settler groups, Jews came to the Americas seeking a better life and better economic opportunities, as well as freedom from the religious discrimination and persecution that they faced in Europe. Jews from Western Europe were part of the early settlers that migrated to the Americas and participated in the settlement. The exception was New France where Jews were barred from residing as immigration was restricted to Catholics. Jews did settle in the British colonies to the south and, later, with New France becoming part of the British Empire, they also began to settle in Lower Canada.



Figure 2: Star of David Hanukkah menorah

The first Jewish community in Canada was established in Halifax, Nova Scotia in 1749. It was made possible by the treaty of Utrecht (Holland) which settled territorial disputes. Britain received the territories of Nova Scotia, Newfoundland, and an area around the Hudson Bay which became the centre of the Hudson Bay Company in 1670. Halifax was a military outpost at that time, but immediately attracted Jewish merchants from Newport and Plymouth in the English colonies on the north-east Atlantic seaboard. In 1752, there were thirty Jews among a population of two thousand; however, by 1777, economic problems forced most of the Jews in Halifax to return to the American colonies or to England.

The start of a permanent Jewish presence in Canada is connected to the British conquest of New France. In 1759, the British rulers abolished the ban on settlement of non-Catholics in the colony. The first Jews to settle were members of the British army which had defeated the French under General Jeffrey Amherst. After occupying Montreal, Amherst asked the merchants in his army to stay in Canada in order to help develop the country. Twelve Jews agreed to do so and are considered the pioneers of the Jewish community in Canada.

Canada's first synagogue, Shearith Israel, opened in 1768 in Montreal. By this time, the Jewish community in Montreal had grown such that it was able to build the synagogue. By the late 1700s, Jews had also settled in Quebec City and other parts of Lower Canada. The Hart family was particularly prominent in the area of Trois-Rivieres. A member of the family, Ezekiel Hart, was elected to the legislature of Lower Canada in 1807 but was denied his seat because of religious discrimination. A census in 1831 listed 107 Jews living chiefly in and around Montreal.

Immigration and settlement in Western Canada came much later in the 1800s, following the gold rush on the Pacific Coast. Migration to the Prairie provinces followed the building of the Canadian Pacific Railway which was completed in 1885. According to a census taken in 1881, 33 Jewish families were living in Manitoba at the time—21 of them in Winnipeg—with about 100 individuals in all.

MASS MIGRATION AND THE GROWTH OF THE CANADIAN JEWISH COMMUNITY (1850–1939)

In 1881, there were still only 2393 Jews in Canada. By 1891, their numbers had risen to 6414 and, by the early 1900s, they reached 16,000. Eventually, by 1930, the Jewish population of Canada grew to over 155,000 people.

By the end of the 19th century, 80% of the world's estimated 10 million Jews lived in the Russian, Austro-Hungarian, and German empires. Jewish immigration to other lands was stimulated by the possibility of better economic conditions and the desire to escape the prejudice, legal discrimination, and violence they experienced in Europe. *Pogroms* (violent mob attacks on Jewish neighbourhoods involving rape, injury, murder, looting, and destruction) in the Russian Empire began in 1881. Jews fled Eastern Europe to many lands, including Canada, in the period from the 1880s to the beginning of WWI. Some also migrated north from the United States, an aspect of cross-border migration common in much of Canadian history that continues to this day.

Jewish Canadians from Western Europe urged their governments to receive the Jews fleeing from Russia and other parts of Europe. As a result of such pressure, the Governor General of Canada put forward a proposal to accept Jewish refugees, with the intention of settling them in the sparsely populated west.

By the time the onset of WWI curbed immigration, there were about 150,000 Jewish Canadians. Montreal and Toronto combined accounted for about three-quarters of the Canadian Jewish



Figure 3: Russian Jewish Immigrants 1911

population, but Jews could be found in every major city and in dozens of smaller places.



Figure 4: Stub from French Cleaners, 1938, with Logo “We Are Not Jewish”

Jews worked as retailers and wholesalers, many beginning as peddlers and working their way up to established businesses. Jews also provided much of the labour for the urban sweatshops of the new ready-to-wear clothing industry. Jewish merchants spread out to small towns, adding synagogues to the places of worship found in rural Canada.

Jews in Canada found that they were not free from discrimination in their new land. Religious intolerance at this time was a common feature of Canadian society. Anti-Semitism was prevalent among Canada’s cultural and political leaders. Jews in Canada faced discrimination and limitations on their freedom similar to Jews in Europe.

During the period between World War I and World War II immigration was significantly restricted by the government. In 1930, the Canadian government responded to the unemployment caused by the beginning of the Depression by imposing severe restrictions on immigration. Although the cabinet could, and did, approve entry into Canada for certain immigrants, permission for Jews to enter was almost never given.

Jewish Settlement in the West

In the late 1800s and early 1900s, there were efforts to free Jews from the persecution and the restrictions on owning farmland that they experienced in Russia and other Eastern European countries. The Jewish Colonization Association was one such effort—it sponsored fifteen Jewish farm colonies which were established on the Canadian prairies.



Figure 5: Israel Hoffer and Jewish farm boys clearing stones from the land, Sonnenfeld Colony, 1926, Saskatchewan

Despite these efforts, few of the colonies did very well. This was partly due to the lack of farm experience that Jews of Eastern European origin had as a result of not being allowed to own farms in their former countries. One exception was the Yid’n Bridge settlement in Saskatchewan, started by South African farmers.

This settlement grew and eventually became a town, whose name was later changed to the anglicized name of Edenbridge. The Yid’n Bridge Jewish settlement did not extend to a second generation as community members sought better opportunities elsewhere. Beth Israel Synagogue in Edenbridge is now a designated heritage site. In Alberta, the Little Synagogue on the Prairie is now in the collection of a museum.

During this period, most of the Western Jewish Canadians tended to be storekeepers or trades people. Many established businesses on the new rail lines, selling goods and supplies to the construction workers, many of whom were also Jewish. Later, because of the impact of the railways, some of these small settlements grew to be prosperous towns.

Also during this period, Canadian Jews played important roles in developing the west coast fishing industry, while others worked on building telegraph lines. Some, who were descended from the earliest Canadian Jews, continued their ancestors work as fur trappers. The first major Jewish organization to appear during this period was B'nai B'rith which, to this day, remains the Jewish community's independent advocacy and social service organization.

World War II (1939–1945)

The Jewish community in Canada lobbied the Canadian Government to increase immigration and give asylum to Jews fleeing Nazi and European persecution; however, as described in the book *None is Too Many*, anti-Semitism in Canada led to these pleas being ignored. Only 5,000 Jewish families were allowed to enter Canada during the 12-year period of Nazi rule in Germany. Most other allied countries admitted tens of thousands of Jewish immigrants in an attempt to save them from the Holocaust. It was not until after the war that the Canadian immigration policy regarding Jews began to change. In 1939, Canada was one of the countries that turned away the MS St. Louis with 908 Jewish refugees aboard. Eventually, it was forced to go back to Europe where 254 of them died in concentration camps.



Figure 6: Jewish personnel of the 1st Canadian Army celebrating a Passover Seder meal, Brussels, Belgium, 29 March 1945

In spite of widespread anti-Semitism, almost 20,000 Jewish Canadians volunteered to fight for Canada during World War II.

The Holocaust had a deep and significant impact on Canadian Jews. Although, one in seven Canadian Jews in the 1950s were survivors or the children of survivors, most Canadian Jews, during the post-Holocaust period, seldom discussed the events and experiences. The Holocaust was simply incomprehensible for many and too painful for most. Growing awareness in the 1960s of the need to study, discuss, and remember the Holocaust and the reality that anti-

Semitism had not disappeared led to initiatives related to keeping the memory of the Holocaust alive and brought the importance of Holocaust education to the forefront.

Post World War II (1945–2000)

Shortly after World War II, in response to a growing economy in need of workers and a change in policies and attitudes, Canada liberalized its immigration policies. Approximately 40 000 survivors of the Holocaust immigrated to Canada in the late 1940s. In the 1950s, Many Jews fled hostilities in the newly independent countries of North Africa and immigrated to Canada, settling mostly in Montreal, where their French language skills were an asset.

After World War II, the immigration figures increased. Of the one and a half million newcomers who settled in Canada between 1945 and 1975, about 100,000 were Jews. In 2011, 1.0% or 329,495 of respondents to the National Household Survey reported being affiliated with the Jewish religion (Statistics Canada). This included 11,110 Manitobans.

From the 1960s onwards, there were new waves of Jewish immigration. Some South African Jews decided to emigrate to Canada after South Africa became a republic. This was followed by another wave of emigration in the late 1970s, which was precipitated by anti-apartheid rioting and civil unrest.

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, immigration from North Africa, especially Morocco, was substantial. Political and economic developments throughout the world have continued to influence trends in Jewish immigration to Canada. Since the 1990s, new immigrants from the countries of the former Soviet Union and Argentina, among others, have significantly changed the face of the Canadian Jewish community.

The Jewish presence in Canada is strong, with the largest populations in Ontario and Quebec, followed by British Columbia, Manitoba, and Alberta. While today Toronto has the largest Jewish population in Canada, historically Montreal had the largest Jewish population until many English-speaking Jewish Canadians left for Toronto during the 1970s because of nationalist political parties in Quebec, as well as Quebec's language laws.

Jewish Presence in Manitoba

Jewish settlement in Winnipeg is considered to have started with the arrival of 24 Russian Jews on May 26, 1882. They were followed on June 1 of the same year by an additional 247 persons (Herstein). They found themselves in a small town with a total population of 7,000, including a small number of Jews. Eleven Jewish farm colonies were founded in Saskatchewan and Manitoba, assisted by the Jewish Colonization Society.

For some of these Jews, the farmland which had been promised was slow to materialize and the government had made no other provision for their employment or maintenance. Most of the Jews who reached western Canada in the last two decades of the 19th century were concentrated in Winnipeg which,

with the completion of the railway, became an important centre of commerce and light industry.

By 1935, 17,000 Jews were estimated to live in Winnipeg, of which 90% lived in the working-class North End (Trachtenberg). At that time, the Winnipeg Jewish community was composed largely of immigrants from Europe and their children. Prevalent religious discrimination and intolerance towards Jews marginalized the community. They were “barely tolerated by the host society” (Trachtenberg). Nonetheless, it was an extremely organized and self-supporting community. The community had more than twenty institutional buildings and fifty *landsmanshaften* (mutual benefit organizations composed of people from the same places in Europe), as well as several women’s groups.

Winnipeg Area

The small Jewish community in Winnipeg was composed of Reformed and Orthodox Jews—each group eventually founding its own synagogue.



Figure 7: Rosh Pina Synagogue, Martha Street and Henry Avenue, Winnipeg, 1969

Several moderate groups of Sephardic and Ashkenazic backgrounds combined and founded the Shaarey Zedek congregation in 1880. In 1890, the Shaarey Zedek synagogue was built on King Street. This Conservative synagogue, with its own cemetery, also ran a Hebrew school for several years. In 1913, a new building was to be erected; however, the congregation amalgamated with the Shaarey Shomayim instead and the King Street building was expanded. A new building was eventually erected in 1950 on Wellington Crescent and is still in existence today.

The Sephardic minority in 1893 formed the Rosh Pina congregation and synagogue located on Henry Street. Rosh Pina tended to appeal to the traditional and Orthodox members of Winnipeg’s Jewish community, especially to the new immigrants. Both of these synagogues exist today.

Later in 1904, a Reform congregation—the Holy Blossom Congregation—was formed. The congregation soon changed its name and became Shaarey Shomayim Congregation. That same year, Orthodox Jews built a large synagogue, Beth Jacob, in the heart of the ever-growing Jewish community in the North End.

In 1913, the Shaarey Shomayim and Shaarey Zedek congregations were united under the name Shaarey Zedek to tend to the spiritual needs of the Jewish community in the South End. It became a bastion of traditional, yet progressive,

Judaism in Winnipeg. Services were conducted in English by ordained *rabbis*, graduates from rabbinical seminaries in the United States.

Over the years, a number of smaller congregations formed in the North End of Winnipeg, primarily serving the Orthodox Jewish population. Overtime, due to changes in affiliation and other demographic factors, the Orthodox presence in Winnipeg diminished. Of the 15 orthodox synagogues founded between 1906 and 1932, only seven remained by the late 1960s.

As the Jewish population shifted within Winnipeg, and as it matured and became more prosperous, older synagogues ceased to exist while others, in newer sections of the city, were founded. In the North End, the centre of concentration of a diminishing Jewish population moved steadily northward and, with each successive move, synagogues were established in the new neighbourhoods. In 1952, the new Rosh Pina synagogue was the last synagogue to be built in north Winnipeg.



Figure 8: Teachers and schoolchildren in front of the schoolhouse, Narcisse Colony, Bender, Manitoba, 1921

As the Jewish population spilled over into West Kildonan—a suburb bordering the northern limit of Winnipeg—the B'nai Abraham congregation built its synagogue there, in 1958. With the steady growth of the Jewish population in West Kildonan, the Chevra Mishnayos congregation erected a synagogue in 1965 in Garden City, a new district situated in the north-west section of West Kildonan.

The Jewish community in the South End experienced a similar growth pattern. In the 1940s, an increasing number of Jews moved southward across the Assiniboine River into the area of the city known as River Heights. The Shaarey Zedek built a new synagogue in 1950, closer to the neighbourhood of its membership. As in West Kildonan, the population kept on growing and another congregation was born, the Adas Yeshurun Synagogue, in 1955.

More recently, Jewish immigrants have arrived in Manitoba from Argentina, the former Soviet Union, and Israel. The Jewish population of Winnipeg was estimated to be 13,690 in 2011 and approximately 16,000 in 2017.

Beyond Winnipeg

Winnipeg historian and writer Allan Levine has researched and written extensively about the history of the Jewish community in Manitoba including the *Coming of Age: A History of the Jewish People of Manitoba*, which won the McNally-Robinson Book of the Year Award in 2010. The information in this section draws on his research and writings.

As previously indicated, the Jewish community in Manitoba dates back over 141 years. While not the largest immigrant community (according to Allan Levine, at its height the Jewish community constituted 2.8 per cent of the total provincial population in 1931), it has been one of the “most vibrant and culturally rich Jewish communities in North America.” (Levine)

“Beyond the city’s perimeter, in scattered agricultural colonies and country villages and towns of Manitoba, Winnipeg became the proverbial homeland for hundreds of Jewish farmers, labourers, and storekeepers and their families, attempting to retain their religion and heritage. The city served as their supply depot for kosher food and a place to pray on the High Holidays.”
(Levine 2012)

At first, many Jewish immigrants were attracted by the lure of owning their own land. Some of the first Jewish settlers lived in St. Adolphe. Between 1880 and 1914, about 10,000 Jewish immigrants came to Manitoba, largely from the Russian controlled Pale of Settlement, which was located in what are present-day Poland, Lithuania, Ukraine, Belarus, and Western Russia.

A small number of Jews that immigrated tried farming at such agricultural settlements as Bender Hamlet, near Narcisse. Most of these agricultural communities disappeared during the Great Depression.

Levine indicates that, during the period extending from 1920 to the mid-1950s, there was a Jewish presence in more than 100 towns and villages throughout Manitoba. Many of these Jews were general storekeepers.

While larger Jewish communities developed in Brandon and Portage la Prairie, often the Jewish merchants and their families were the only Jews in the communities where they resided.

Today, the majority of the Jewish population of Manitoba lives in Winnipeg.