



# Places

## World

### Israel

Established in 1948, Israel is the world's only Jewish State. It lies in the area biblically referred to as the Land of Israel (in the continent of Asia, in the Middle East region). In April 2013, Israel's population was 8,018,000. At that time, the Jewish population in the area totaled 6,042,000 (75.3% of the population), the Arabs totaled 1,658,000 (20.7% of the population), and all other people in the area totaled 318,000 (4% of the population).

### Jerusalem

Ever since King David made Jerusalem the capital of Israel 3,000 years ago, the city has played a central role in Jewish existence. The Western Wall in the Old City—the last remaining wall of the ancient Jewish Temple, the holiest site in Judaism—is the object of Jewish veneration and the focus of Jewish prayer. Three times a day for thousands of years Jews have prayed “To Jerusalem, thy city, shall we return with joy,” and have repeated the psalmist's oath, “If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning.”

### Temple Mount



Figure 49: Jerusalem: Temple Mount

All three of the world's major monotheistic faiths consider Jerusalem sacred and it is home to many important religious sites for Jews, Christians, and Muslims. Since biblical times, various groups have fought for control of the

land that is Israel and Jerusalem. Israel and Jerusalem have a tumultuous past that continues to the present time.

An example of the importance of Jerusalem to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam is the Temple Mount located in Jerusalem's Old City. The Temple Mount is believed to be Mount Moriah, where Abraham offered to sacrifice his son Isaac to God.

For Jews, the Temple Mount is the site on which the First Temple was built by King Solomon in 957 BC to house the Ark of the Covenant (which held the Ten Commandments) in a special room called "The Holy of Holies". In Judaism it is the holiest of sites and the Foundation Stone under the dome is where, in the Hebrew scriptures, Earth was first created.

For Christians, the Temple Mount is of importance because Jesus prayed there daily and later preached with his disciples.

For present-day Muslims, this complex houses two very important Islamic structures, the Dome of the Rock and the Al-Aqsa Mosque. Muslims refer to this complex as *Haram al-Sharif* (Noble Sanctuary). It is the 3rd holiest site in Islam after Mecca and Medina in Saudi Arabia. Muslims believe that a winged horse from heaven, Buraq, carried the Islamic prophet Mohammed from Mecca to Jerusalem and back during the *Isra* and *Mi'raj* or "Night Journey" in the seventh century. It was also the direction toward which Muslims were to pray before God allowed Muhammad to pray towards Mecca instead.

## The Western (Wailing) Wall

The Western Wall (in Hebrew the *Kotel*) is commonly known as the Wailing Wall. It is for Jews one of the most significant religious sites, if not the most significant. It is also one of the sites that people throughout the world are likely to identify with Judaism and Jerusalem. Essentially, the Western Wall is a very ancient stone retaining wall built for the 2nd Temple that surrounds the whole Temple Mount plaza. Jews believe it to be the closest spot to Solomon's original temple and the Holy of Holies (or Gate of Heaven). It is as close to the site of the original Sanctuary as Jews can go today. The Temple was located on a platform above and behind this wall. It is the place towards which Jews face when praying. The wall is the only remnant of the Temple's outer surrounding wall.



Figure 50: The Wailing/Western Wall, Old City Jerusalem

For Muslims, it is known as the Buraq Wall, where the Prophet Muhammed tied his winged horse Buraq, while others believe he tied him to the rock which lies under the dome.

Jews will often leave prayer notes between the crevices of large stones, *bar mitzva*hs are held there, and people pray at the site 24-hours a day. Following Orthodox custom, there is a separate women's prayer area off to the right side. Only a small section of the Western Wall is accessible as the balance extends underground.

During the 1948 Arab-Israeli war, the Old City of Jerusalem (historical centre) and The Western Wall were captured by Jordan. Jerusalem became a divided city and Jews faced restrictions on access to the site for 19 years. During the 1967 Six-Day War, Israel recaptured the Old City and Jews regained access and control of all of Jerusalem.

## Gathering Places/Places of Practice

### Historical

When the term The Temple is used in conversation or in Jewish written texts, it refers to a place in Jerusalem that was the center of Jewish worship from the time of Solomon to its destruction by the Romans in the year 70 C.E. The Temple was the one and only place where sacrifices and certain other religious rituals were performed.

The Temple was partially destroyed at the time of the exile of the Jews to Babylonia, but was rebuilt. The rebuilt temple was known as the Second Temple.

Traditional Jews believe that The Temple will be rebuilt when the *Mashiach* (Messiah) comes. They eagerly await that day and pray for it continually.

Some contemporary Jews, reject the idea of rebuilding the Temple and resuming sacrifices. They call their houses of prayer temples, believing that such houses of worship are the only temples that Jews need and the only temples they will ever have. For them, these are equivalent to the Temple in Jerusalem. This idea is very offensive to some traditional Jews.



Figure 51: Model of Ancient Jerusalem  
Model of Ancient Jerusalem, was commissioned in 1966 and shows the Temple. The replica is located outside the "Shrine of the Book" and shows how the city looked in biblical days.

## Contemporary

Synagogue is the term used to designate the place where Jews gather to pray and hold their religious rituals. The Hebrew term for synagogue is *beit k'neset* (literally, House of Assembly).

The Orthodox and Chasidim may also use the Yiddish word *shul*. The word is derived from a German word meaning school, and emphasizes the synagogue's role as a place of study.

Conservative Jews usually use the word synagogue, which is actually a Greek translation of *beit k'neset* and means place of assembly (it's related to the word *synod*).

Reform Jews generally use the word temple, because they consider every one of their meeting places to be equivalent to, or a replacement for, The Temple in Jerusalem.

The use of the word temple to describe modern houses of prayer offends some traditional Jews because it trivializes the importance of The Temple. The word *shul*, on the other hand, is unfamiliar to many modern Jews. Therefore, the word synagogue is commonly used in Canada.

## Functions of a Synagogue

The synagogue is the center of the Jewish religious community: a place of prayer, a place for study and education, a place for social and charitable work, as well as a social centre.

A synagogue has multiple functions. First, it is a *beit tefilah*—a house of prayer. It is the place where Jews come together for communal prayer services. Jews can satisfy the requirement to pray daily by praying anywhere. However, there are certain prayers that can only be said in a group and require the presence of a *minyan* or *quorum* of ten adult men. As well, it is traditionally believed that there is more merit to praying with a group than there is in praying alone. The sanctity of the synagogue for this purpose is second only to The Temple. In *rabbinical* literature, the synagogue is sometimes referred to as the little Temple.

In addition, a synagogue is usually also a *beit midrash*—a house of study. Contrary to



Figure 52: Synagogue and Congregation Emmanu-el, Victoria B.C.

Built in 1863, it is the oldest surviving synagogue in Canada. The synagogue is still in use today. The building is a National Historic Site of Canada.



popular belief, Jewish education does not end at the age of *bar mitzva*h. For the observant Jew, the study of sacred texts is a life-long task. Thus, a synagogue normally has a well-stocked library of sacred Jewish texts for members of the community to study. It is also the place where children receive their basic religious education.

Most synagogues also have a community, or multi-purpose hall for religious and non-religious activities. The synagogue often functions as a sort of town hall where matters of importance to the community can be discussed.

In addition, the synagogue may function as a social welfare agency, providing support and assistance for the poor and needy within the community.

## Inside a Synagogue

The Sanctuary is the portion of the synagogue where prayer services are performed. Synagogues in Canada and North America are generally designed so that the front of the sanctuary is on the side towards Jerusalem, which is the direction that Jews are supposed to face when reciting certain prayers.

The Ark is probably the most important feature of the sanctuary. It is a cabinet or recession in the wall that holds the *Torah* scrolls. The Ark is also called the *Aron Kodesh* (holy cabinet).

The Ark is generally placed in the front of the sanctuary or the side that faces towards Jerusalem. The Ark has doors as well as an inner curtain called a *parokhet*. This curtain is in imitation of the curtain in the Sanctuary in The Temple. During certain prayers, the doors and/or curtain of the Ark may be opened or closed. Opening or closing the doors or curtain is performed by a member of the congregation, and is considered an honour. All congregants stand when the Ark is open.

In front of and slightly above the Ark, you will find the *ner tamid*, the Eternal Lamp. This lamp symbolizes the commandment to keep a light burning in the Tabernacle outside of the curtain surrounding the Ark of the Covenant. (Exodus 27:20-21).

The Menorah (candelabrum) can be found in addition to the *ner tamid* in many synagogues, symbolizing the *menorah* in the Temple. The *menorah* in the synagogue



Figure 53: The Ark: Mishkan Yoseph Synagogue



Figure 54: Menorah in the Sephardic Museum in the Sinagoga del Transito, Toledo, Spain

will generally have six or eight branches instead of the Temple *menorah's* seven, because exact duplication of the Temple's ritual items is improper.

The *bimah* is a pedestal located in the centre of the room or in the front. The *Torah* scrolls are placed on the *bimah* when they are read. The *bimah* is also sometimes used as a podium for leading services. There is an additional, lower lectern in some synagogues called an *amud*.

In Orthodox synagogues, there is a separate section where the women sit. This may be on an upper floor balcony, or in the back or on the side of the room, separated from the men's section by a wall or curtain called a *mechitzah*. The rationale for this is so that men can focus on their prayer rather than on more earthly concerns.

The *mikveh* is a pool or a bath of clear water. Ritual immersion by men and women is an ancient part of Jewish tradition. This practice is both noted in the *Torah* and in later *rabbinic* commentaries. Today, there are only a few cases where immersion is still designated as a *mitzvah*, or an act required by Jewish law. These are

- for converts to Judaism
- for brides
- for women observing *niddah*, the practice of immersing monthly following menstruation

*Mikveh* was also used for other purposes throughout Jewish history. For example,

- by men prior to *Shabbat* and the holidays
- by women in the ninth month of pregnancy
- as an aid to spirituality, particularly on the eve of the *Sabbath* and festivals, especially the Day of Atonement
- to commemorate a wide variety of transitions and occasions such as prior to reading *Torah* for the first time; before or after surgery; on the occasion of being ordained a *rabbi*; on the occasion of becoming a grandparent; or when reaching the age of 40, 50, or 85

Many religious traditions use water to denote purity, change, and transformation. In Jewish tradition, water is part of their sacred narrative, as when Hebrews traveled through the waters of the Red Sea as they left Egypt, marking their transformation from a tribe of slaves into a free people.

*Mikveh* is the Jewish ritual that symbolically enacts this kind of profound change for individuals. The mikveh pool recalls the watery state that each of us knew before we were born: the ritual of entering and leaving *mayyim hayyim*, living waters, creates the time and space to acknowledge and embrace a new stage of life.

Most contemporary *mikvoth* are indoor constructions, involving rain water collected from a cistern, and passed through a duct by gravity into an ordinary bathing pool; the *mikveh* can be heated, taking into account certain rules, often resulting in an environment not unlike a spa.

## Gathering Places in Manitoba

There are several synagogues in Winnipeg and its surrounding area.

- Ashkenazi Synagogue (Orthodox)—297 Burrows Avenue, Winnipeg, MB R2W 1Z7
- Aish HaTorah Winnipeg Learning Centre—[www.aish.com/winnipeg/](http://www.aish.com/winnipeg/)
- Chabad-Lubavitch of Winnipeg (Orthodox)—1845 Mathers Bay, Winnipeg, MB R3N 0N2 [www.chabadwinnipeg.org/](http://www.chabadwinnipeg.org/)
- Chavurat Tefilah (Fellowship of Prayer) Synagogue (Orthodox)—459 Hartford Avenue, Winnipeg, MB R2V 0W9
- Chevra Mishnayas Synagogue (Orthodox)—700 Jefferson Avenue, Winnipeg, MB R2V 0P6
- Congregation Etz Chayim (Conservative)—Formed by amalgamation of Beth Israel, Bnay Abraham, and Rosh Pina synagogues in 2002—123 Matheson Ave E, Winnipeg, MB R2W 0C3, [www.congregationetzchayim.ca/](http://www.congregationetzchayim.ca/)
- Hebrew Congregation of Winnipeg Beach—Camp Massad, Winnipeg Beach
- Herzlia-Adas Yeshurun Congregation (Modern Orthodox)—620 Brock St, Winnipeg, MB R3N 0Z4, [www.herzlia.org/](http://www.herzlia.org/)
- Lubavitch Center of Winnipeg—[www.chabadwinnipeg.org/](http://www.chabadwinnipeg.org/)
- Shaarey Zedek Congregation—561 Wellington Crescent, Winnipeg, MB R3M 0A6, [www.shaareyzedek.mb.ca/](http://www.shaareyzedek.mb.ca/)
- Talmud Torah Beth Jacob Synagogue (Orthodox)—1525 Main Street, Winnipeg, MB R2W 3W3
- Temple Shalom (Reform)—1077 Grant Ave, Winnipeg, MB R3M 1Y6, [www.templeshalomwinnipeg.ca](http://www.templeshalomwinnipeg.ca)
- The New Shul of Winnipeg Inc (No affiliation)—[www.jewishwinnipeg.org/directory/the-new-shul-of-winnipeg-inc](http://www.jewishwinnipeg.org/directory/the-new-shul-of-winnipeg-inc)

Secular or Humanist Jewish organizations include the following:

- The Sholem Aleichem Community, Inc. Youth School Programs  
PO Box C-105  
123 Doncaster St, Winnipeg, MB R3N 2B2  
<http://sholemaleichemcommunity.ca>
- United Jewish People's Order (UJPO)  
<http://ujpo.org/>

# Notes