

UNITED STATES

Fire destroys Minnesota synagogue

BY [BEN SALES](#) SEPTEMBER 9, 2019 9:16 AM

Adas Israel Congregation ablaze, Sept. 9, 2019. (Screenshot from KBJR Channel 6)

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(JTA) — An early Monday morning fire destroyed a synagogue in northern Minnesota.

The cause of the fire at the Adas Israel congregation, a traditional synagogue in Duluth, was unclear, according to Duluth Fire Chief Shawn Krizaj, though he said officers had not found any accelerants. Police and other law enforcement are investigating what sparked the fire, and have interviewed multiple people of interest, said Police Chief Mike Tusken at a press conference.

It appears to have destroyed much of the building, which was built more than a century ago. There were no fatalities, though one firefighter was injured and needed to be rescued when he was hit with falling debris. He was treated and discharged from the hospital later in the day.

“I want to thank everyone for their concerns over this tragic fire,” said Mike Bitton, an Adas Israel board member, at the press conference. “Many of us here today represent our grandparents and even our great grandparents who built this synagogue. Special thanks to the Duluth fire department and Police Department for the heroic efforts in trying to save our synagogue. All of us in the Jewish community here in the Twin Parts are grateful to the entire community for your support.”

At least one of the synagogue’s Torah scrolls was saved, according to the Duluth News Tribune. The scroll was in the basement, which was built from stone and was less damaged than the building’s upper floors.

“It feels like one of your family members passed away,” David Sher, a board member and lifelong worshipper at Adas Israel, told the Star Tribune, a Twin Cities newspaper. “We have no idea what we are doing [next]. There are no words right now.”

The synagogue has around 50 members. The local Jewish federations have started a fundraising campaign on behalf of the synagogue, and another local synagogue, Temple Israel, has offered Adas Israel temporary space.

“We thank the Duluth Fire Department and the Duluth Police Department for their swift response to this terrible incident,” Steve Hunegs, executive director of the Jewish Community Relations Council of Minnesota and the Dakotas, said in a statement. “As we approach the Jewish High Holy Days, we offer our full support to our fellow Jewish Duluthians.”