

Baruch (Benedictus de) Spinoza was born in Amsterdam on 24 November 1632. Baruch's parents were Portuguese-Jewish immigrants who had settled in Amsterdam in search of religious freedom after they had been obliged to publicly convert to Christianity back in their home country.

Baruch studied Hebrew and Jewish texts but then moved on to wider philosophical works thanks to his father, a fruit merchant, paying for a private tutor to teach him Latin. Baruch also studied science and worked as a maker of lenses, then something of a Dutch speciality.

Baruch's parents remained an important presence in Amsterdam's Jewish community. This community did not take kindly to Baruch's more radical views, particularly his questioning of both the accuracy of the Bible and the claim that it was the only true source of human history. In July 1656, Spinoza was excommunicated as a heretic.

Baruch changed his Hebrew name to a

Latinized version, Benedictus, and retreated into philosophy.