Jeremy Rosen - Chanukah The Truth About the Maccabees

- [Jeremy] Ready.

- [Wendy] Welcome back.

- It's lovely to be back with you.

- Yeah, we're thrilled to have you. So I'm going to hand over to you. Thank you. Looking forward to the presentation.

- Okay. So today we're going to talk about Hanukkah, probably, possibly, the most controversial of all the Jewish festivals or holy days. First of all, how the heck do you spell it in English? C-H? H? A-N? A-N-N? A-N-N-K? K-A? K-A-H? You can't win. But it's not just the name, of course, it's the whole background and the history of it. So I want to take you back in time a little bit. I want to go back, roughly speaking, 2,300 years ago to when Alexander the Great passes down the coast, on his way, first of all, to Egypt and then to Babylon. And Alexander passes down and is met by the head of the Jewish community living in Israel, Rebbe Shimon Hatzadik, Simon the Just. It had been the policy of the Persians, amongst who most Jews were now living, since the days of King Cyrus, to allow everybody to worship whichever religion they wanted. It didn't matter what you worshipped , all it mattered is you accepted the authority and the power of the Persian Empire. And the same thing with true of Alexander the Great.

So long as you accepted me as the boss, I don't care how you worship, but put an image of me in your temple, and I'll be happy. Shimon Hatzadik was the first person who had a problem with this, not because he wanted to rebel against Alexander, on the contrary, but he couldn't put an image of Alexander in the temple in Jerusalem. And so he came up with a compromise, so the story goes, and the compromise was that every child born that year would be named after Alexander. And that's why Alexander is such a Jewish name. And the Yiddish Sender comes from Alexander, Sander. And that is the story of Shimon Hatzadik and Alexander the Great, which I'll probably mention again at some other time. But when Alexander died, he divided up his great empire amongst his generals, who were a terrible lot. And these generals fought amongst themselves, and they lost the unity that Alexander had briefly imposed. The Middle East was divided between two generals. In the north, there was Seleucus, based in Damascus and Syria, and in the south there was Ptolemy, based around Egypt.

And these two hated each other's guts. And they fought all the time. And the poor Jews of Israel were stuck in the middle, and they kept on having to adjust to whoever was in charge. Look at the year 174 before the common era. And the head of the Seleucid Empire is a man called Antiochus, Antiochus III, and he's in conflict with Ptolemy, down in Egypt. But Antiochus reiterated the fact, I don't care how you worship, I don't care what your religious life is, so long as you accept me as the boss. And he actually had a formal declaration, which repeated the declaration of Cyrus, that everybody could worship any way they wanted to. Unfortunately, when

he dies, his son who takes over is called Antiochus IV. Antiochus, who called himself Epiphanes, the holy one, and the people around him called him Epimanes, the crazy one. He had actually spent his youth as a hostage in Rome. So if you like, he went to a very rigid boarding school away from home, and obviously that had some impact on him. He came through the Judean Israel territory on the way down to Egypt.

He expected the Jews to support him, when they didn't, and when he was defeated, he took it out on them. Now, at this moment, the Jews are led by the high priest, and you'd think that the high priest was a holy position. In theory it was, it was in charge of the temple, but the high priests were made, or came from three major priestly families, and they hated each other, and they competed with each other. So you see, we Jews have always been an argumentative lot. And the role of high priest was usually won by whoever bribed or whoever had the biggest impact on the guy in charge. Now, at this moment, the Greek Empire is, if you like, the America of its day, great freedom, great commercial opportunities, and there were rivalries between Jewish merchants and Greek merchants, but each one carried on in his or her own way. Antiochus IV, coming back from defeat in Egypt, suddenly decides that he wants all Israelites to become Greek. Now, many of the people at the time in the land of Israel were indeed very pro Greek. Sorry about this telephone in the background.

I meant to switch it off but I forgot to do it. The priests, who were the upper classes, were by and large pro Greek, and, actually, they'd introduced the circus and the games into Jerusalem and the theatre as well, but most of the ordinary people tended to be more nationalist and less pro Greek culture. Antiochus IV, when he imposes this rule for the first time on the Jews, that they have to become Greek, cause an uproar. You know what Jews are like. We're happy to do whatever we feel like doing. The moment somebody tells us what we've got to do, that's the moment at which everybody gets their backs up. And that's what happened. The priests, by and large, in the city, in Jerusalem, took a lenient line, didn't care too much about it, but the country priests got really worked up. And one of them, a man called Mattityahu. And Mattityahu, or Mattathias is somebody who comes from a dynasty called the Hasmoneans, the Ḥasmona'im, the Hasmoneans. And people often wonder what's the difference between the Ḥasmona'im, the Hasmoneans and the Maccabees. Aren't they the same?

Well, yes and no. This man, Mattityahu, decided we've had enough of Greeks trying to tell us what to do, so it's time to fight back. He was an old man, he had five sons, and the strongest one of his five sons, not the oldest, was a man called Judah. And Judah decided the only way to defeat the Greeks, they are a massive army, we don't have the numbers, but we're going to try guerilla warfare. Now, the myth of Judah is that he managed to defeat the Greeks, and it's not quite true. He didn't really because the Greeks didn't take him too seriously initially. They had their citadel in Jerusalem, in the centre, they had desecrated the temple because they thought the temple should be the same as any other temple. And when they heard that there was this guerilla called Judah around the place, they sent a small little detachment to try and get him under control. And in fact, that is what happened. From 176, before the common era, when Judah decides, we've had enough of this, the Syrians keep on sending little armies with

second-rate generals, not taking him very seriously.

And the fact is that Judah and his guerillas managed to defeat about five different detachments sent against him, but the trouble was that back in Syria, there was problems, political problems, and the main generals wanted to stay there. So Judah waged this campaign, he managed to get back possession of the temple. The citadel was still in Greek hands, but he got the temple back in his hands, back at the right moment, and he rededicated the temple. And this is where the word Hanukkah comes from. Hanukkah literally means to dedicate, to dedicate the temple. How do you dedicate the temple? When? When King Solomon dedicated the first temple, it took eight days over the period of Sukkot, and so they had eight days to celebrate the dedication of the temple. There's no mention in the Book of Maccabees about anything about candles or eight-branched candelabrum or the miracle of the oil. The Books of the Maccabees, two books, Maccabee One and Maccabee Two, were written in Hebrew, originally, soon after the events of the Maccabee Revolt. And they were, in fact, translated into Greek, and became part of the Christian Bible, not the Jewish Bible.

Part of what is called the Apocrypha. And that is the basis we have of what we know about the Maccabees written near to that time, other people took that text and followed it later on, but they're our source, and I say they just talk about the rededication of the temple taking eight days. Soon after the temple was dedicated, the Syrians say, "This is serious." And they send down a major army under a General Bacchides. And the General Bacchides comes up against Judah, and, unfortunately, Judah dies. He's killed, and he's then followed by a younger brother, Simon. Now, the story that he defeated the Greeks, of course, is not true because he never got rid of Greek oppression, he never got rid, completely, of Greek presence in Jerusalem, but he did manage to get a degree of independence. The Syrians backtracked, took away their limitations and allowed the Jews to revert to the way things were before. And so that is why Judah became a little bit of a hero, called Judah the Maccabee, the hammer, macav is a hammer, like Edward I was the Hammerer of the Scots, so Judah Maccabee was the hammerer of the Syrians. He died.

The sequence of those who followed is very interesting. After him came Simon, and Simon was accepted by the Syrians as the high priest, and later on, he was accepted as the king. And then when he died, actually he was killed by his son-in-law, not a very nice relationship that went on in the family afterwards, they turned into a dynasty of unpleasant, nasty kings who waged war on everybody they could, got involved in any conflict they could, one after another after another until, at a certain point, the reputation of the Hasmoneans was so bad that they became a by word for corruption. So after we have the various battles that, in effect, created an impression of aggression, which inspired other people to treat the aggressors back with aggression, and for the first time, you have tension between the Greek population and the Jewish population. After Jonathan and Simon, then you have a series of kings, one of them, there's, of course, the famous John Hyrcanus, there's the famous Jannaeus, Yannai. Yannai had a wonderful wife. Her name was Salome, or Shlomtzion HaMalka, Salome the Queen.

Salome was married, actually, to the head of the rabbinical community, Shimon Ben Shetach. And they got on very well except her husband, Yannai, got on very badly. And there was tremendous conflict between the aristocrats and the priests and the ordinary, shall we call them the ordinary rabbis. When Shlomtzion's husband died, she became queen. And Shlomtzion was the only Hasmoneans ruler who was a good, decent, lovely person. She made peace, she reconciled everybody, she stopped fighting with everybody. She was wonderful until she made the typical mistake of a Jewish mother. She handed over power to her two sons, Aristobulus and John Hyrcanus, who were such a stupid, mean, unpleasant, nasty collection of brothers who fought amongst each other all the time, that in the end, the Romans had to intervene and get some sort of control because Romans now were the big power who'd succeeded and overtaken the Greeks, and they also wanted peace in their regime. And they decided to appoint a ruler by the name of Herod, whose father had been a convert to Judaism, an Idumaean.

Herod became king roundabout 40 before the common era, and of course we all know what a nasty piece of work King Herod was. He was succeeded by an incompetent son. And then he was exceeded by a grandson called Agrippa, who was a really nice guy, but by that time, the Romans had taken total control over Judea, were imposing their rule on the Judeans, and they had procurators, in other words, governors who actually controlled what was going on in the country. The Jews had lost their autonomy, and the Jews, between each other, divided, between those who said, look, let's make peace, let's come to terms, let's settle in with the Romans and not have too much trouble, and those who said, no, we want them out. The right wing versus the left wing, if you like, the assimilationists verses the extreme nationalists. And it was a result of these extreme nationalists that Romans got so fed up with the Judeans that, in the end, they invaded. They gave them every warning, they invaded, they destroyed Jerusalem, they destroyed the temple.

And that was the end of that era of Jewish history in which the priests played a major role, in which the temple was the centre. And in then come the period we call the period of the rabbis. The rabbis had always been there, in terms of the Pharisees, as balancing and counterbalancing. The Sadducees, they were the more popularist, those who cared about the masses, not only about their own pockets and their own interests, but they developed a new kind of brand of Judaism which was focused more on study and on learning and on doing things in the home as much as in the temple. And they looked back on this period of the Hasmoneans as not a very nice period, and, therefore, they were not inclined to glorify somebody like Judah Maccabee and son, the whole idea of rebellion against authority. And so they decided to remodel, in a way, the Hanukkah story. And that's when they came up with the idea that when the Jews got back, Judah Maccabee got back to the temple, and the first thing you have to do when you get back into the temple and get it going is to light a light because in the temple, there was this ner tamid, this continual light that was burning on the seven-branched candelabrum.

And that was a light, when they came back to dedicate, they couldn't have enough oil for, but they did find oil, and they did light it, but it was going to take a long time before they could get new supplies of oil to light it. And that, they said, took eight days, not the eight days of

Solomon's dedication, but the eight days it would take to bring oil back in order to replenish the candelabrum, which makes a problem because the miracle couldn't have lasted eight days because the first day was no miracle. There was enough oil to last. So what were they coming back with this idea of eight days instead of the seven days? And why were they making this story of the oil and the lamp so central to the idea of Hanukkah? Now, the cynics will say, or, if you like, those with a sense of worldview that of course they emphasise the idea of lights because come wintertime, everybody had a festival of the lights to do with the winter solstice. And whether it was the Zoroastrians in Persia who worship the light or the Christians who had a celebration of Christmas, this is why the rabbis began to put so much emphasis on the idea of lights and the idea of displaying lights in order to show that we are proud of the fact that we are still around. And the miracle of Hanukkah then came to represent the survival of the Jewish people, but not militarily. That's why the rabbis were no heroes of Judah Maccabee.

And when in the Talmud, which they wrote, and they wrote it roughly somewhere between 5 and 600 years into the common era, which is about 700 years after the Hanukkah event, they only emphasise this fact of the miracle, and the fact, indeed, that they overcame the Greeks. They overcame the Greeks religiously, spiritually, if you like, but they don't mention Judah Maccabee, they just talk about the Ḥasmona'im, Mattityahu, as the man who was important, the founder of the dynasty, but not the rest of them. They don't want to know them. They only want to emphasise this idea that this is a spiritual festival in which it's the spirit that counts. And so they actually were able to take a famous line from the prophet Zechariah, Zacharias, who lived long before the event of the Hasmoneans, in which he said, "Not by might, not by strength, but by the spirit do we survive." And so Hanukkah came to be the idea of the religion of spirit. There's another important aspect to this idea. So if we're discounting the military victory, and if, in a way, we're also, to some extent, discounting the actual historicity of the miracle of the lights, why is it that Hanukkah came to be so important?

The Maccabees, the Book of Maccabees, mentioned the fact that the rebellion against Rome, against Syria rather, was initiated by a group of people called the Hasidim, the pious ones. Now, who were the Hasidim? Who were the pious ones? Not the Hasidim we now know because they didn't appear on the world until the end of the 17th century and the beginning of the 18th century. So who were these Hasidim? And in this, we need to go back to the history of mysticism in Judaism. I'm not going to give you a long lecture about the Kabbalah now, some other time, please, God. But the truth is that there has always been a strong vein of mysticism in Judaism right from the very beginning. Because we are such rationalists, we can't imagine that mysticism was so important. And not only that, but in the rational western world in which we live, we think mysticism is a bit iffy, it's a bit unreliable. They used to say mysticism starts in a mist and ends in a schism.

But, in fact, when you look at the Torah, you see that fire, that light is a synonym for the mystical connection with God, the experience of God. Just think of Moses meeting God on the burning bush. Just think of Mount Sinai full of fire and flame. Just think of Elijah going up to heaven in a chariot of fire. And in fact, during this early period of the Jewish people, when we know about

the judges and the kings and the priests, the prophets actually were the mystics. They were not part of any structure. They weren't part of the Church of England or of the authority in any way. They were not appointed by anybody. They were purely charismatic leaders, which is one of the reasons why you have women prophets, but you don't have any women priests. And they were symbolised by this idea of fire being the way to reach God through passion, through experience, rather than theology or any other way. Of course, they expected people to live a religious life, but religious life was about controlling our habits. How you rate to God was spiritual and mystical. And in fact, when later on the Talmud is going to talk about mysticism, it's going to talk about what's called merkava, the chariot. And this chariot is the chariot of the first chapter of the Book of Ezekiel. And this first chapter of the Book of Ezekiel is full of a vision of God, which looks very much like something from out of space, but it's surrounded with fire and with flames and with smoke.

And this was called the chariot of God, the fire of God, and all mysticism that comes after it refers back to this first chapter in the Book of Ezekiel, in the Book of Yehezqel, and, therefore, the idea that we reach God through a non-rational, mystical level is something that was built in to the system of the early Jewish development of religion. The time of the Greeks, the Greeks become the initiator of rationalism. They are the great philosophers. Socrates, Aristotle, Plato, they don't believe in this nonsense. They want rational answers. But because Greece was also such a physical, such a physical world, where control of the body by the mind was so important, you think of the games and of the theatre and all these important things, they represented an alternative that the Jewish spirituality found problematic. They were perfectly happy to take on rational thought when it came to things like medicine, although they also agreed that you have to deal with something, if you like, that depends more on the non-rational part of the mind, faith-healing and other factors like that.

So in the battle against the Greeks, parallel with the battle against the Greeks on the ground, there was the battle against the Greeks culturally. And it was this that the Hasidim represented, they represented this idea of the spiritual as opposed to the physical so that when you get to the time of the rabbis, and the time of the rabbis in the first century, you have, clearly in the Talmud, this departmentalization, compartmentalization between those who were mystical and those who were not. One of the most famous of all the mystics was Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai. Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai is supposed to be the man who wrote the "Zohar", and is represented today by the gatherings of hundreds of thousands in Meron in northern Israel, on Lag Ba' Omer, the anniversary of his death. And he was a pupil of Rabbi Akiva. Rabbi Akiva was the greatest rabbi of that generation, arguably, and he was a zealot. He believed in fighting, whereas Shimon Bar Yochai believed in retreating into the cave and meditating. And so Hanukkah, therefore, became the symbol of Shimon Bar Yochai's passive resistance, cultural resistance to the Roman oppression, whereas Rabbi Akiva became more the symbol of the physical fight against and the support of, later on, Bar Kokhba.

And Bar Kokhba himself rebelled against Rome, and it was put down and the Jews suffered horribly as a result of that Hadrianic persecution of the Jews. So there you have the, if you like,

the official story and the unofficial story of why Hanukkah is so important. Of course, we in the West and in the Christian world now make a big thing of it because we want something to counterbalance Christmas to keep our children happy, and that's why, for example, we give them lots of presents. But the Jewish traditional point of view is not so much presents, it's more to play with a dreidel to, in fact, gamble. Now, officially, gambling is not permitted, but gambling for nuts with a dreidel, or, indeed, for cards, Kvitlech, as they're called in certain circles, became the important way of celebrating Hanukkah in addition to the sufganiyot, in addition to the donuts, the donuts were made out of frying some pastry, some dough and frying in oil, and so they say that's how it became celebrated specifically on Hanukkah.

The gambling though is a different issue. Gambling, being something that the Talmud disapproves of, they were prepared to allow it on one period of the year, the eight days of Hanukkah. And the reason why they allowed it is because they wanted to emphasise that much in life is fate. A lot that happens is beyond our control, totally beyond our control. A drunken driver coming at us is out of control, and there's nothing we could have done to stop it, nothing we were guilty of. These things happen. Planes crash, accidents happen. And so because they wanted to show that life is not always stable, and, in a sense, the ability to continue and to survive is quite a miracle, they felt that gambling on Hanukkah was the right way to show what an unusual day it is and make it slightly different. So here we have the range of options. And the truth of the matter is we don't know what the real truth is. We do know that Judah Maccabee was able to reconquer the temple. We do know that, in due course, his brothers and then his grandsons were kings of Israel for a brief and bloody period.

We do know that it all came to a crushing end. We do know that the rabbis don't mention Judah Maccabee or make a big fuss of him. And we do know, ironically, that today the Israel games, the Jewish Olympics are called the Maccabean Games. And the Maccabean Games is ironic because games was a Greek pagan idea originally, and now that we celebrate it in the land of Israel, I'm not sure the rabbis are so happy about it. But too bad. There are lots of things they're not happy about. And in the end, we evolve, we make our choices, and the answer to what does Hanukkah mean to you is really what do you mean Hanukkah means to you and how it matters to you and not anybody else. So we now will go over to question time, and I can look up and see what I've got on my screen as to what questions I'm going to answer. So the first question comes from Amain and says, does denial of Jewish aggression at the time lead to the romance of Hanukkah and subsequent rabbinical interests? And the answer, I think, I've already dealt with in a little way, but the answer, in effect, is yes. I think aggression is always a problem. But if I can digress for a moment to talk about the attitude in the Torah to aggression.

Because if you remember, there was a famous story when Jacob comes back from exile with Laban and camps around the city of Shechem, and his daughter, Dinah, goes out into Shechem and she gets raped. Jacob doesn't know how to deal with this situation. The two brothers of Dinah, Shimeon and Levi, come and discover what has happened. And they decide they've got to take matters into their own hands. They negotiate with the men of Shechem, in which the deal goes like this. The men of Shechem will convert to Judaism, and they will merge the two

groups together, but to convert to Judaism, they have to circumcise, and to circumcise is going to mean they're going to be in pain for a couple of days. Well, they agree. On the third day, Shimeon and Levi enter the town of Shechem, and they massacre every single male. And they take their sister, Dinah, back home. When they get back home, Jacob says, "What a horrible thing you've done to me. You've given me this horrible reputation as being aggressive. Now everybody's going to hate me. They're going to gang up against me. What am I going to do?" Shimeon and Levi replied, "I'm sorry, we can't let people get away with this." And the Torah leaves it completely unanswered. There's no conclusion.

And the conclusion that we deduce from this is that sometimes you have to be aggressive, sometimes you don't have to be aggressive. Aggression is very, very dangerous. When Jacob comes to die and bless his children, he turns around to Shimeon and Levi and says, "You are aggressive bullies. I don't have anything to do with you. You've got to be divided. You are a disaster area." So he resented, he thought they were wrong, but he doesn't reply to what they said, "We can't let people see our weakness." And so the fact of the matter is both of them are true, that when you indulge in violence, there's a danger of losing your sense of morality. On the other hand, sometimes you have to defend yourself. So it's this ambiguity that we find throughout Jewish law. Jewish law is not black and white. There are always alternative ways of looking at it. So now I'm going on to Teddy Herman, who asked me what about Josephus? Josephus you know was a Jew who abandoned the Jewish people during the time of the Roman first invasion in 70 and joined the Romans.

So he became a bit of an apologist for the Romans. He was given a pension. He went to live in Rome, where he spent the rest of his days. It's interesting that, actually, Josephus' father was called Mattityahu, the same name of the founder of the Hasmonean dynasty. And he, Josephus, wrote a book, series of books called "The Antiquities of the Jews." But for Hanukkah, he completely follows the text of the Maccabees. In other words, he looks at the military reconquest, if you like, of the temple. He talks about the dedication, the lights he talks about is the light in the temple, but not the eight day. He doesn't mention the eight-day miracle. The first record of that, as I say, is in the Talmud, which was written hundreds of years after Josephus. But he does confirm the Book of Maccabees' version of the story. Okay. Ellie Gordon asked, does Hanukkah commemorate a civil war? I don't think it commemorates the Civil War. The Civil War, actually, as you know, at that time was a war between the Sadducees and the Pharisees, initially, at the time of Hanukkah. The Sadducees, they're called Seduqim in Hebrew from the house of Zadok, Zadok, they were the priests.

The perushim were the rabbis. They were the opposition. As I mentioned before, they were more interested in the masses, in nationalism, the Sadducees, the Tzadukim were more interested in the temple and aristocracy. The Christians, the New Testament doesn't like the Pharisees, but the fact is that their real opposition were the Sadducees. The Pharisees had no problem, but we'll come to that some other time. But the actual civil war, in which Jews were fighting Jews, actually came at the time of the second, at the time of the destruction, the time of 70, in the year 70, where you had the zealots against the Pharisees. The Pharisees, the main

party of the main rabbis were in favour of accommodation. They were in favour of peace. It was the extremists, the zealots who waged the battle and caused the disaster. And so it was a reaction against their disastrous military campaigns that the rabbis emphasised the peaceful side of Hanukkah. And then of course, the other side of the coin is you had the dead-seas sects, who said to hell with the lot of you, we're getting out of here, and we're going into isolation. Let's move down to some more questions. Let's see who we have. So from Pamela.

Q&A and Comments:

Q: Were the Greeks and Syrians the same people at the time?

A: Well, no, they weren't, ethnically, the same people at the time. Remember, Alexander of Macedon was from Macedon, Northern Macedonia, Northern Greece, where today the Greeks still get upset about independence, somewhere, independence of Greece. He came down, he united the Greeks, and then, with the Greeks, he invaded the Middle East. But he invaded the Middle East with a relatively small army. And not only that, but his policy was to settle parts of his army in different parts of his conquered territory, as far as Afghanistan, even India. And what he did is he harnessed the local population to run their own affairs, just putting a Greek, pro Greek guy in charge. Now, when he died, and, therefore, the areas were divided up. So Syria was still full of the local Syrians. Egypt was still full of the local Egyptians, it's just that they had a Syrian governor in charge.

But the Syrian governor, of course, favoured people migrating from Greece into the Middle East in order to get employment, in the same way, for example, when very often Jews immigrated into Israel in the 15th after the expulsion century, later on in the 19th century, and brought opportunities. A lot of Arabs and others from around the area migrated into the area in order to take advantage of the new material opportunities. This is a phenomenon we see today. Everybody wants to find an opportunity. So there were people from all around who came into the area of Syria, into the area of where the Jews were living, but it was a Jewish state run by the high priest and good relations with everybody else so long as they didn't want to fight. If they did, they got what they asked for.

Q: So we go on now to Mona Strasberg. I'm not sure about the ail of the eight days. Which destruction was it? When did the candelabras come in?

A: That's an excellent question. In every temple, from the first temple that Solomon built until it was destroyed in 586 before the common era by the Babylonians, there was the seven-branched candelabrum. And the seven-branched candelabrum always had one of its lights called the Western light, permanently burning day and night. And when the temple was destroyed, that light went out. When Judah Maccabee came back and rededicated the temple, they had to light that light on the seven-branched candelabrum. And that's what it was really until the Talmudic period.

It wasn't until the Talmudic period, roughly speaking 500 years afterwards, that we suddenly have this idea of eight lights for eight days. But originally they didn't have a candelabrum as such, because Jewish law said you mustn't imitate any of the vessels in the temple. The vessels in the temple can't be imitated. Well, then how do we deal with eight lights on Hanukkah? We can't put it on a seven branch because we can't imitate that one, so the, and as by and large at that time, they had lights were in little ceramic holders. Most people had them. They had eight little ceramic holders they put next to each other. They didn't have candelabrum to begin with, but when they did, that's when the eight candelabrum that we have today became fashionable. Next question.

Q: What form of gambling occurred in Maccabean times?

A: Well, that's not an area of my expertise. I don't know, but I know everybody gambled with stones and with dice and things like that. That's a good question. I think I'm going to have to try and do some research on that and try and find out what it was.

A Christian friend of mine who grew up in Bible-reading family told me the church couldn't understand how a Scottish family like the Maccabees got into the Bible or the Macintosh. That's a great one. Yes.

Q: Jack Ben Tatar. I'd read that the menorah placed in windows was a symbol of support for the regime, and as such, mandatory. Is there truth in this?

A: Not at the time because most Jews didn't have windows. Glass was a luxury. Most Jews lived in very modest huts and very often straw huts or in caves. So the idea of the playing in the windows comes from the rabbis. The rabbis, in the Talmud, say that, we, sorry, Hanukkah has to pirsumei nisa, when we have to publicise the miracle, and we publicise the miracle with the candelabras or with the lights, and so we've got to show everybody the lights. And originally the lights were placed outdoors, in front of the door. The Talmud talks about lights being placed in front of the house. And it goes into the whole question of, okay, well, in which case, if a camel passes by laden with straw and catches fire, who's to blame? Is it the camel owner's fault or is it the owner of the house who put the, who put the menorah in the street? And so clearly everybody used to. They didn't have big story houses the way we do today. And so that's where the idea of putting it above and in the window area, even though they might not have had windows, but out of, immediately on the street developed. So it was important to put it in somewhere publicly, but I don't think that the idea of the windows was at the time of the Hasmonean regime. It came later.

Q: There are some tombs today near Modi'in. These are believed to be the tombs of the Maccabees. Is that a legend or indeed graves of the Maccabees?

A: That's a fantastic question about anything in Israel. It's true Modi'in was the town where the Maccabee family came from, that nobody disputes. But where anybody is buried in Israel

nowadays from that period is speculative. We can't know. There were so many invading armies coming through and digging things up and smashing things down. We don't know for certain. It's, if you like, tradition. Do we know where King Arthur was buried or do... Until recently, we didn't even know where Richard III was buried. So there are all kinds of traditions about where people were buried.

Q: Is Rachel buried in the grave of Rachel in Bethlehem today?

A: I honestly don't know. I do know that after the state of Israel, people came and discovered that King David was buried on Mount Zion, but nobody believed that was true. It was just good for the tourist trade. So the great answer is, I don't know if their tombs are really the Maccabee tombs. They could have been tombs of other people. They might have been, not been, but it's interesting. But Modi'in definitely was where they came from.

Q: Who wrote the Book of the Maccabees?

A: We don't know. It's now available in Hebrew. You can find it in Hebrew. It's been translated. There are all kinds of various additions put up by the Hebrew University. Just go online. They're readily available. They're a great read.

Q: Can you understand Charles Lamb's attitude to Jews as an anomaly of a stubborn…

A: Sure. We are stubborn. We've always been stiff-necked. We've always been stiff-necked since the time of Moses. But everybody's been stubborn. What? You're telling me the Christians weren't stiff-necked in saying, "You've got to be a Christian, otherwise we're going to burn you at the stake."? Or the Muslims aren't stiff-necked? Unfortunately we are. But we no more than anybody else has been stubborn. Our stubbornness has enabled us, in a sense, to survive. And because we've survived so long, that's why we are the obvious target because everybody in the world looks for scapegoats. And we're the handy scapegoat. Our stubbornness is a problem.

Yes, we're an argumentative lot. I have this big problem. I love my Judaism. I'm not certain about so many of my co-religionists. What can I do? But yes, that's who we are. Lucille Cohen. In the case that many Jews at the time the Maccabees were drawn to Greek culture, after Plato, there was very little between them in outlook. Well, that's not entirely true. I mean, I'm going to deal with this in greater detail in a lecture I hope to give about the influence of Greece on Judaism and Alexander the Great, so perhaps I would leave that to then and answer it then, if you don't mind.

Q: What can I tell you about the Book of Maccabees?

A: Basically, it's a storybook. It's a story about people at the time, about how they were dealing with the Syrian oppression, how they were dealing with the circumstances. It's an interesting read. I would probably, whether it's in English or in Hebrew, but it's an interesting read, and if

you've got time, I recommend it.

Q: Lucille Cohen. So much of the Torah was translated into Greek, and the rabbis of the Talmud says Septuagint is just as holy as the Torah in Hebrew.

A: Well, yes. It's interesting. The rabbis of the Talmud say you can say the blessings in Greek, they accepted Greek, if you like, linguistics, science, technology. What they didn't accept was the Greek attitude to life, Epicureanism or stoicism, and their non-religious or spiritual approach. That's what the argument was about. It wasn't about the use of the language.

Q: Can you talk more about the haftara readings?

A: A lot of them are very stream of consciousness and somewhat obscure in meaning. I'm interested to know how the prophets related to mysticism. Well, that's, again, a very long answer. An interesting answer. The haftara were introduced probably around the time of the Hadrian forbidding reading the Torah in public. When the rabbis instituted the idea of having somewhere from another part of the Bible that referred to the theme of the Torah for that week, which they were not allowed to read in public so that people would know what it was. And their choice varies. Sometimes it's a case of history of one king doing something or a fight between two kings, sometimes it's extracts from the prophets, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, they're the most popular ones. And these prophets wrote beautiful poetry.

And the poetry they wrote was about the fact that the Jewish people, at that time, were so terrible, were so disastrous, were heading for destruction because they were corrupt and dishonest and hypocritical. And the prophets were saying, "Get it right. Follow the Torah as the Torah was meant to be. Be ethical, be caring and charitable and nice, and stop relying on the Egyptians and the Assyrians and the Babylonians." And they wrote it in this beautiful poetry. And so sometimes this message was a message of saying something like prophet, Jacob, don't worry, you may be in exile now, but God will bring you back. And so they would make that haftara the haftara for the part of the Torah that deals with Jacob or Exodus or something like that. So all the haftaras are taken from the prophets, and many of them are streams of consciousness, of beautiful poetry, but subtlely within each one is a clear reference to the Torah reading of that week. Still got time for a little more.

Q: Why do Ethiopia's not celebrate Hanukkah till reached Israel?

A: That's an excellent point. Why indeed not? Because Hanukkah and indeed Purim were not mentioned in the five books of Moses, or in the Old Testament, although Purim was the Book of Esther. The Ethiopians is in argument about whether it was Jews who brought Judaism to Ethiopia or early Christians who brought Judaism to Ethiopia. Most people think they were early Ethiopians, and that's why they have no record of rabbinic Judaism and no record of Hanukkah as being a festival. It's true Purim was in the Book of Esther as part of the Bible. So that's why they don't have any rabbinic laws. And why when they came to Israel and were welcomed back

to Israel because of their supposed Jewish origin, they had to go through a nominal conversion to rabbinic Judaism to add on to their Old Testament Judaism.

Q: Where does the dreidel come from?

A: You know, I honestly don't know that. I don't know what its history is. I'm going to look it up for you so that next time I get asked that question, I'll know where it came from. I just know it's been around for a very, very long time. And on the, on the dreidel itself, the letters of the dreidel are Nun for Nes, Ge for Gadol, a great miracle, Hayah Sham, was there. But, again, I'm not certain that that's why those letters were there in the first place. Probably the answer lies somewhere in mediaeval superstition, but I don't know. I'm going to find out. Dice, known from ancient tombs. Yes indeed. So they probably were. And knuckle bones, you're quite right. That's a very good answer. Absolutely. Origin of dreidel, I'm not certain. We dealt with that. Thank you.

Remember me from Bulawayo? Ah, that was a wonderful time in Bulawayo. Was it 1966? What a beautiful place it was. What a wonderful community. I had such a wonderful time there. I was only there for a short time 'cause I was still studying at the time, and at that time I remember how we all thought that there was going to be a new regime when you handed over to some nice indigenous people. And look how the country got destroyed. What a disaster. But anyway, thank you, Daphne. Thank you very much.

Q: Bernard Oster. Is it true the rabbis approve the Torah written in Greek based on the same status of one written in Torah?

A: Yes. The story of the Septuagint, the Septuagint's story is that under Ptolemy, 70 rabbis were gathered together and were put in separate rooms and told to translate the Torah together into Greek, it shows they knew Greek, in order to come up with a proper authorised translation. And the fact is they all came up with the same translation, even with a couple of words that they altered. So there's one word which is very rude about buttocks, which they changed to another word so as not to have something that sounded a bit iffy in it. And, yes, the Septuagint was accepted as authoritative by the rabbis, less so the Vulgate, which was in Latin. And although when it came to making a blessing, you had to make a blessing over a Hebrew Torah, they had no problem about reading the Greek version, which they thought was pretty reliable.

Q: Oil lasting eight days, not a miracle? Which miracles do you believe?

A: Well, of course it depends on what you mean by a miracle. Many of the miracles that are described in the Torah were just the right thing happening at the right time. Knowing when the tides were to cross over. Many of the miracles are considered to be something that could be interpreted in different ways. If by miracle you mean something unusual, something that gets you to stop and think, then I think there are lots of miracles. I would say, for example, the six-day-war was a miracle if it comes to that. The establishment of the state of Israel is a miracle. The fact that we've survived for so long is a miracle. I don't think a miracle is

necessarily magic because as the Torah says, anybody can perform miracles. Even Egyptian magicians can perform miracles. And the Torah says, in chapter 13 Deuteronomy, don't listen to miracles. And my mother who says miracles are the least important part of religious commitment and identity. People seem to like them, but don't know. Don't think so.

Q: I got an answer about Tzfat. Was Tzfat any significance?

A: Tremendous significance because after the exile from Spain in the 1490s, many Jews were welcomed by the Ottoman Empire and came to Tzfat because at Tzfat, at that time, there was industry. There was the sheep industry, textile industry, jobs for people. And that's where the modern version of Kabbalah becomes so powerful. Before that, there was a different version of mysticism. It wasn't called Kabbalah. So in a sense, the Kabbalah we know today owes to two factors, the emergence of a book called the "Zohar" and Tzfat. So Tzfat was a very important, and today still is important. All the weirdos gather in Tzfat. I'm a bit confused about Syrian rule, Greek rule, whose terms seem to be interchangeable. Well, they are, that's quite right. They're referred to as Greeks. They're referred to, officially, as Greeks, the Syrian Greeks and the Egyptian Greeks. But they were the Greeks based in Syria who were different to the Greeks based in Egypt, and that's why sometimes you refer to them as Syrians. But, basically, it's the same thing. Answer live.

Q: Would you be prepared to give a talk on the subject of Job?

A: It's a book I can't understand. I'd love to hear it. I'd be always happy to talk about the Book of Job. It's a very complex book. Its Hebrew is the most difficult Hebrew of all the books in the Bible. It's terribly difficult, but, nevertheless, yes, anytime. I love teaching, so I'll teach Job too. Hanukkah gelt. Well, Hanukkah gelt really comes from, in a sense, the idea of gambling. Of gambling from and using money for it. And so the two go together with celebrating Hanukkah. And so when you gamble, you're given Hanukkah gelt in advance by mommy or daddy, or whoever it is, and you gamble with that gelt as opposed to gambling with your own investment money and losing it all at Las Vegas.

Nigel. Hi, Nigel. Was the source of Birkat Hamazon in the days of Mattityahu?

A: It wasn't. Birkat Hamazon, its true, is mentioned in the Torah in general terms, V'akhalta v'savata u'veirakhta, you should eat and you should bless and you should enjoy. But the actual wording of these blessings is Talmudic. It's much later. And so Al HaNissim, which is a berakah that's in the very early Talmudic programme, also talks about Mattityahu and defeating the Greeks and lighting lights, but it doesn't talk about the eight-days ceremony. It talks about the lights in the temple. Okay. Let's move on to the next one.

He did indeed. Judas Maccabee No, that's not it. I'm sorry. Here comes the glory of the, here comes the conquering hero. Definitely did.

Edith Cooper. The nominal conversion of Talmudic Judaism a few years ago, after a while, it was considered racism. Yes, yes. I'm only talking about what happened initially. I mean, initially, it's interesting, even when the Yemenites came to Israel in 1948 and 1949, there were some people who insisted they'd been out of touch with Judaism for so long that they had to put their condition right. This is another example, in my view, of rabbinic authoritive overreach. And I don't know why people have to, in religious power, in every religion, have to throw their weight around and make the wrong decisions when they do, but, unfortunately, that's what happens.

I don't know if we've got time, I'm happy to go on.

Q: Why do we say full hallel on Hanukkah and not on Purim?

A: Excellent question. Because Purim took place outside of Israel, and we only say hallel on a celebration that's linked with the land of Israel. So that's why we don't say it on Hanukkah. And that's the difference.

Derived from the German word drein, which means the spill. Oh, very good. So it's Yiddish origin. So again, Yiddish is a mediaeval language, so it's mediaeval. That's it.

Impact on Christian world. Please comment. I think, if you don't mind, given the constraints of time, I'd like to leave that one for a different time because it's a complicated issue. It does have an impact.

The discovery of oil in the temple by the Macabees appears to be part of discovery in the Torah school in the time of Josiah. That's an excellent point. A very good point as well of discovering something that was lost as a way of continuing and repairing something that was a disaster. Thank you very much Noreen and Brian.

Q: Why is Hanukkah only a minor festival when it celebrates Jewish independence for the first time?

A: Because major festivals are those in the Bible. Anything after the Bible is called minor.

Q: When was written?

A: I don't know the exact time, but it's definitely mediaeval. Definitely mediaeval, but I don't know the exact date. It's another thing I'm going to have to find out. Who wrote it? What else do we have? I think that's it.

- Jeremy, thank you very, very much for an excellent presentation once again.

- I'm sorry about the phones. I always forget to get them turned off. I'm getting-

- No problem at all. It was not a, it was not, it didn't interfere with your presentation at all.

- Thank you. Thank you, Wendy.

- Thank you. So I look forward to seeing you soon and-

- Yeah, indeed.

- And the next lecture.

- Exactly. And to all the others at the next lecture.

- Happy Hanukkah, everybody. Enjoy it.

- Thank you. Goodnight everyone.