

Jeremy Rosen - Did Jesus Crib From Hillel

- Now, one of us. Right? All right. So Jeremy, so are there any other exhibitions that you would recommend?

- There's some great stuff that, in the Gagosian. I've forgotten her name. There's a woman artist there that's absolutely incredible. There's good stuff downtown. I mean, if you're interested, I can get my son to look up various places for you. Just give me the time and the date that's free for you, and we'll do it.

- Well, thank you. I do know, I am somebody with the galleries. What I would like to recommend, for those people who are in New York, our exhibition of the Guggenheim is extremely interesting, and we are open. And Dominique Levy, who's a fabulous gallerist in New York, has an incredible exhibition, Italian's Palazzo. So, she's on Madison Avenue, so I would highly recommend that. And while we're waiting, for our participants, who are already here, Jeremy was saying that there's an outstanding exhibition on at the Met dealing with Couture, right? Jeremy? What were you saying?

- I was just saying how stunning it was. I've never quite, you know, I don't know much about dress, or women's dresses, or anything like that, but visually, it was such a brilliant presentation.

- Yeah.

- In a long time, I haven't seen such a presentation, and the different styles are absolutely stunning. So listen, we'll have to get together to talk about what we'll see when you come to New York.

- Perfect. All right, so for those of you listening who are in New York, Haute Couture at the Met, amongst other wonderful exhibits. So now once again, I'm going to welcome our Jeremy Rosen back, who's going to talk about Did Jesus Crib from Hillel. So Jeremy, welcome once again, and looking forward to hearing your presentation. Thank you.

- Thank you, Wendy. Thank you. I want to say at the start of this, it is not my intention in any way to undermine any religion or myths. Myths have a function, whether they are factual or not. I'm just interested in examining the development of religious spiritual life at a particular moment in history. And it concerns, of course, the rise of Christianity. There's a lot of new academic debate about when, how, Christianity emerged from Judaism, when it broke from Judaism, this process that went over almost 500 years. But I want to track it through to the beginning. I don't think that it is possible in any way to historically identify the actual persona of Jesus any more than one can identify the actual persona of Moses or of Abraham. But the role of Jesus needs examining, because it is my belief that Christianity developed initially from the Dead Seas Sects.

Now, if we go back approximately 2,100 years, so about a hundred years before the beginning of the Christian era, the Jewish community was divided between the community in Babylon, the community in Israel, community in Egypt, and a lot of Jews in Rome. And at that time, Jewish law, if you like, was divided between the Sadducees, who were the priests, who ran the temple, the Pharisees, the rabbinical school, who were more institute, more interested in the masses, in making the religion amenable, but still had a structure based around a kind of a Sanhedrin. And then you had the group that we now know generally as the Dead Sea Sects, who got so fed up with the political and religious wrangling in Jerusalem that they withdrew down to the Dead Sea, to the caves of Qumran, and others. And each one of these sects was slightly different. The Therapeuti, for example, were men only. Others were combined.

Some of them were more progressive, some of them were less. And they wrote their own interpretations of Torah texts, and developed their own customs, that if you examine the Dead Sea Sects today, it's all out there in the open. And it's these Dead Sea Sects that have got Christians to look again at the origin of their own religion. Was Jesus the founder? Was Jesus a Jew? Was he not a Jew? And this comes from an era of great creativity, in which certain people are concerned with how do we make our religion meaningful? Some wanted to keep it narrow, to a small group, and other people wanted to expand it. And amongst those who were expanding, there were literally hundreds of preachers and teachers in Judea at that time who were going around, not only preaching and teaching Torah, but also, because they didn't have medical systems in those days, healers, curers, charmers. They were concerned with providing for the masses. And a hundred years or so before the beginning of the Christian era, you have a man called Johannan, who is the most well known of the preachers in Judea. We know him now as John the Baptist. And why do we call him John the Baptist?

Because until Johannan, the only use of the mikvah was primarily entering into the temple. If you went into the temple, you purified symbolically by allowing water to pass over you, rather like Noah's flood cleansing you and starting again, and you'd go into the mikvah, everybody, male and female. It was John and the Dead Sea Sects that said, no. Everybody can purify themselves. Judaism believes that everybody's a priest. So let everybody baptise themselves, regularly, at the start of every day, if you can. So this is where John the Baptist emerges as the first figure we can recognise as somebody who is looking to expand the area of interest of Judaism to a wider audience amongst the Jews by making it more personal, and making everybody feel they're important. And at the same time, in the Dead Sea Sects from many of their documents, we know there was an idea of the teacher of righteousness, somebody who would come and make this world a better place, to get rid of the occupational forces, to get rid of the corruption. Corruption in the temple, corruption in monarchy.

There was corruption everywhere, as there is today. And they were very interested in seeing a new era, whether this would come about through, if you like, a change in the natural order, or whether it would simply come about by people being nicer to each other. They wanted to see a new world, a new era. And that is the background to the period roundabout the year zero, when Herod is the king, or he's just about died. Herod is the king of the Jews, he died before Jesus.

There was another later Herod who was the one probably more well-known in the New Testament. And at about this time, you have the emergence of a figure, but there is no trace of this figure. The trace of the figure of Jesus comes about from the Gospels, four, and some say five, and some say even more, documents that are written after the destruction of the temple. So this is at least 50 years after the year zero. I mean the temple was destroyed in 70. But up to that moment, these gospels were talking about a teacher, and a specific teacher, in the name of Jesus, Yeshu, Yeshua in the original Hebrew. And they described him essentially as one of the Judeans going round preaching and teaching to the Judeans and playing this role of a faith healer, a teacher, an advisor, a leader, and a friend.

The gospels, though, were written not in the language that Jesus will have spoken, which will have either been Aramaic as the language of the street, or Hebrew as the language of worship. They were written by four gentlemen in Greek. And unfortunately these four gentlemen, all of them disagree with each other on quite crucial issues. For example, in one of them, the famous story, as we know, that this was Jesus, this was a young man, a leader, who got lots of followers, and he aroused antagonism from the Romans, from the Jews. But we don't know which Jews, whether they were Sadducees Jews, or the Pharisee Jews. The gospels are confused. Sometimes they think the opposition came from the Romans, sometimes from the Sadducees, sometimes from the Pharisees. And that confusion also links into the idea of who will have been responsible for his death and why. Because if you look at the text of the gospels, there's absolutely nothing in the original texts that could be seen as a serious crime in Judaism. There is nothing wrong, for example, with saying, "I'm the son of God." We are all the son of God. The Bible suggests there are sons of men, and sons of God, and you could decide which one you are, but none of them took it literally that the son is God.

So the terms of whether Jesus was the son of God, that should be a problem, certainly not to mainstream rabbinic Judaism, or the rabbis, or the Pharisees at the time, because he wasn't rejecting God, and it's only rejecting God that constitutes a crime. And he was going out and teaching. That's not a crime. And even if he was disagreeing with the Pharisees over whatever it was he was disagreeing with, and it's not clear in the gospel, because in the gospel, Jesus says, I come, in Mark, not to change a jot nor a tittle. I don't want to change the law. But of course other gospels say, yes, he did change the law. So they're confused about that. Then there's a whole question about what day the gospel say Jesus died, or didn't die, or was resurrected. And when they talk about resurrection, nobody actually saw the resurrection. There's a record, possibly, of empty graves, but that could have been grave robbers. Who knows? And so all these areas in which the gospels disagree about what Jesus said, who was with him when he died, what did he do when he died? Was he in pain, or was he gathering all his friends around, and talking to them on the cross? There are so many different contradictions, but that's natural when different people write records, when people remember things differently at a later stage, and probably we're talking about something written between 50 and a hundred years after the supposed events. The real issue is who really founded Christianity?

And to that, we need to look to the next generation. We need to look to Saul of Tarsus or St.

Paul, who had never met Jesus, bumped in, had a vision of him on the road to Damascus. And then there was Peter. Peter and Paul represented two different perceptions of what Jesus was and wanted. According to Paul, Jesus wanted to spread beyond the Jewish people. He wanted to have a version of Judaism that could appeal to the Roman Empire, of which he was a part. Peter, on the other hand, wanted the church to basically remain in the Jewish community, but just accepting Jesus, if you like, as the example, as the leader, as the person who might be an example to everybody. Had the church remained in the hands of St. Peter, it might have remained a Jewish sect reaching out beyond the confines of rigidity, if you like, like reformed Judaism. It might have been the, that was what he had in mind. So Paul, on the other hand, was very much concerned with the idea of appealing to the Roman world, which is why he rather downplayed the role of the Romans in killing Jesus, and rather shifted it preferably towards the Jews. St. Paul was a brilliant publicist.

He was probably the first PR man, and he did an amazing job. But he also did something very, very interesting. In order to appeal to a wider audience, he began to expand the idea of the Jesus character, and he wanted to expand it in one of two ways. Philosophically, there was a big difference between the Jewish approach to God and religion, which was more behavioural. It was more mystical, and emotional, and the Greek Roman way, at the time, which was more intellectual, which focused much more on the division between mind and matter, body and brain. And which saw, and the Greek way, that it is the mind that is the only way to truly understand God, and into pursue God through the mind, one relegates the body to a secondary position, which is the introduction of the idea of monasticism. But at the same time, he also wanted to appeal to pagans in the East where the great God was Astarte, where you needed a woman god in order to balance a man god. And so you can see these different influences coming into a new Christian tradition. And yet, almost all scholars agree that for the first 200 years, some people say even 400 years, but for the first 200 years, it would be very difficult to tell a Jewish Christian from a Christian Jew.

In these early years, this was essentially an outgrowth of the Jewish tradition. But Paul naturally, unlike Jesus said, look, there's certain rules and regulations, like kosher food, like circumcision, and other things like that, that, you know, make it difficult for the ordinary person to take on board. So we're going to scrap that, or at least we're going to relegate it to an inferior or less significant position. Meanwhile, Judaism on the other hand said, no, we are a behavioural religion. We're going to stick to it. Now, for about 200 years, Christianity was, in essence, dormant as an evangelical religion, in the Roman Empire. While Judaism spread throughout the Roman Empire, it wasn't evangelical. It didn't encourage people to convert, which is why when St. Paul starts his mission, he goes round to the synagogues, he goes round to meet those people who like the idea of the synagogue, but it's a bit too much for them. This period comes unto, and during this time, and during this time, the Romans, they really did not like anybody who challenged their political authority, or their ideological authority. They were tolerant of other religions, all of them, so long as they behaved themselves, they didn't mind about it. And it may well be that what upset the Romans initially was that Jesus claimed to be the king of the Jews. But that doesn't really make much sense.

First of all, why would he, of all the other people, claim to be the king of the Jews? And did the King of Jews matter? Well, not to Judaism. Anybody can say I'm the king of the Jews. Unless you give me some more evidence of it, you know, anybody can claim it. It's not a crime to claim I'm the king of the Jews. But for the Romans it could have been, this is insurrection politically, and we don't like insurrection politically. And that was as Christianity became more and more evangelical, was seen as a threat in the Roman Empire. And so Romans were very keen on throwing the Christians to the animals and the gladiators in Rome, and persecuting them, as they did indeed to the Jews, when initially, at the time of the second temple's destruction in 70, and then Bar Kokhba and the Hadrian oppression, they killed Jews too, not for their religious beliefs, but simply for their threat to the political authority of Rome. This all changed with Constantine. Constantine, who lived about 300, he was one of three emperors. There was Constantine, Maxentius and Licinius. And he had a fight with Maxentius, who was in the middle. Constantine was, if you like, on the more Roman side, you had Licinius, who was on the Middle Eastern side, Maxentius in the middle.

And he defeated Maxentius in a battle, I think it was about 313. And together with Licinius, they promulgated the Edict of Milan, which said tolerance to all religions. We don't care who they are, so long as they adhere and accept the authority of Rome. It said that Licinius' mother was Jewish, and he was sympathetic to the Jews, but not particularly interested in giving them any power or authority. But unfortunately, Constantine being ambitious, fought off Maxentius, killed him, fought off Licinius, got rid of him, threw him out, and then decided to make Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire. Myth has it that he, for the battle with Maxentius, he saw a vision of the cross in the sky. But the truth of the matter is that Constantine himself carried on living as a pagan, but he decided that Christianity looked a good idea for the Roman Empire. It would be a way of getting them together. But then what Christianity? Because Christianity at this stage was like Judaism. There's Orthodox and there's a reform, that's varied from Hasidic, each Hasidic group being different, what's he going to do? And all of a sudden he convenes this Council of Nicea in Turkey in 325, and he says, we are going to fix for the first time what Christianity is, and anybody who disagrees with me, I'm going to kill him. And the big fight was how do we define Jesus? Is Jesus God, or is Jesus a great guy?

Now there was a Bishop Arian, and the Arians believed he was a good guy. Nothing small about that, perfectly reasonable. Whereas Constantine was persuaded that no, Jesus had to be divine. And he made that a principle. And he introduced the first credo in Christianity, the Nicene Creed, which said, these are the things that all Christians have to believe, and if they don't believe, you're out, and if you disagree with me, I'm going to kill you. And the truth of the matter is, Constantine killed hundreds and hundreds, people say thousands and thousands of Christians who disagreed with him. And this, if you like, was the beginning of the complete breach with the Jewish people because nobody was going to rival the Christian world. And within a short period of time, there were people who arose, like Bishop Cyril in Alexandria, who not only persecuted the Jews, and killed as many as he could, but persecuted many of the non-Christian Greek and Roman philosophers living in Alexandria, which was a major cultural

centre at that time.

So, this is where the amenity between Judaism and Christianity began with the reshaping of Christianity to distance itself as much as it could from its Jewish roots, and establish itself as, if you like, the world religion as opposed to the national religion of the Jews, if you like, a different approach to whether religion should be more generalised or more specific. Now, why do I think that Hillel is so important in this narrative? Hillel was the greatest rabbi of his generation about a hundred years before the common era. He was a young man who came from Babylon, very, very poor, to the land of Israel, to study in the academies there of Sh'Maya and Abtalion. They say there's a myth in the Torah that he was so poor he couldn't pay to get into the lectures, and he used to climb up onto the roof at night of the lecture hall in order to listen what was going on. And one night it was snowing very heavily, and it covered him, and it shut out the light from above, and so Sh'maya and Abtalion went onto the roof and they found the body of Hillel freezing almost to death, and brought him in and said, this guy deserves free entry for his dedication. And he developed a brilliant mind.

So much so that there was an occasion when the two kind of chief rabbis of Israel at the time, the Bnei Bathyra, had a problem in law. And this young man stood up and he solved it in a way that they couldn't. And they said, look, we can't be the leaders anymore. We've got to hand it over to him. Hillel became known for the academy that he established at the same time as an academy of his great compatriot, in a way rival, Shammai. So Beit Hillel, House of Hillel, the House of Shammai, emerged in this century before the common era as the two powerhouses of Jewish law. When you look at how the Talmud and the Mishnah record the sayings of Hillel, we see that they are exactly the same ideas that you find promulgated in the gospels, and by St. Paul. So for example, whether Shammai was strict on the letter of the law, Hillel, although he was totally committed to the law, was much more flexible. He was much more open. And so for example, the famous myth of Hillel is when somebody comes to him and says, I want to convert to Judaism, but I want to convert to Judaism on condition that you only teach me the Bible, the laws of the Torah.

I don't want to learn all this newfangled rabbinic stuff, which I believe is an invention, which the Samaritans, and the Sadducees themselves within Judaism, didn't accept and fought against. Now whereas when he went to Shammai with this request, Shammai literally took a stick out from behind the door and said, get out of here. I'm not going to listen to this rubbish. Whereas Hillel, according to the text, said, okay, I'm converting you. Come back tomorrow for your first lesson. First lesson he came back and he said, okay, we're going to begin. Alef, bet, gimel. Very nice, come back tomorrow for your second. Second day, he comes back and he says, now lesson today is gimel, bet, alef. Hold on, says the non-Jew. Yesterday it was alef, bet, gimel. Today it's gimel, bet, alef? Oh you know, which is it? And Hillel said to him, listen, you trusted me. You trusted me to teach you the Torah. You were prepared to accept my teaching on the basis of the Torah itself. So why wouldn't you trust me, then, to teach you what is developed out of it, the oral law? And that was his point.

His point was the oral law was a creative mechanism for change and development, and he was happy to welcome somebody in who would be prepared to learn and to study. And it was this process that made him, if you like, the symbol of tolerant, open-minded Judaism for anybody who wanted to come forward. There's also the example of Hillel trying very hard to make life easier for the poor. And so whereas there were laws that were strict, that were interpreted strictly by the Sadducees. Let me give you a simple example of it. The Torah says don't burn fire on the Sabbath. Now, it's interesting. In the temple, there was fire on the Sabbath. The priests were performing sacrifices on the Sabbath. But not outside. And that was part of the division, which I'll go into some other time. But in wintertime, when it's cold in Jerusalem and the priests are in the temple, where it's warm. Anyway, they're rich so they've got lots of blankets. And anyway, if there's a problem, they can always go down to their summer home in Caesarea, or in Tiberius, or even in Rome.

But for the poor peasant, Judean peasants, struggling in the hills of Judea, it was freezing cold. So Hillel reinterprets the Torah to understand, in a sense, the idea that if you prepare your fire in advance, it's not a problem. And that's why, even to this day, we light candles on a Friday evening to show if we've prepared our light in advance, we have it. This is an example. Another example is that technically the Torah forbade lending money for interest, but by the time Hillel existed, the commerce of the Roman Empire required interest. It required this involvement and participation in commerce. And so he had to find a way of allowing it. And he introduced a document called the Prozbul, which was a way of enabling people to do business. Not very different to what nowadays we know as Shariah compliant law. So he was prepared not to take things too rigidly. He was also very much concerned with humanity. Now, we know that love your neighbour as yourself is written into the Old Testament. Interestingly, two years ago, the economist wrote an article in which the writer said, as Jesus said, love your neighbour as yourself.

And that became the myth, that Christianity was a religion of love, whereas Judaism was a religion of law. Hillel tried to combine the both. So not only did he focus on love your neighbour as yourself, he's the first person to say before Jesus, what is hateful to you, don't do to your neighbour. He also said don't judge people. He was very, very concerned with the idea of not judging people. And he was also concerned with corruption. He said don't rely on people in power. You can't trust them. And don't think that just by going through, if you like, the routines of religion, that's going to be enough. Don't think, for example, that wealth makes you wise. Not every wealthy man is wise. And also, stand up for what matters. In a world in which there are no men, you be the man, or the woman. You stand up for what is right. Be part of a community. Don't separate yourself from the community. You can disagree, but still be part of a community. These things were important. So his famous, one of his famous phrases, is this idea that you are responsible for your own life. If I'm not responsible, who will be responsible? He was also concerned with improving the world. And so it's he who introduces the idea we now know as Tikun Olam, which is making the world a better place.

But he didn't mean that at that stage. At that stage, he meant making life livable. You know,

making things reasonable. Don't be unreasonable, think of other people. Don't just think of how strict you want to be. And not only that, but he stressed consistently the idea of study. And here was one of the important things that I believe, in a sense, was lost later on. You see, what's going to happen in due course is that when the Judaism of those earlier generations of the temples disappear, what have you got? If your religion is one based on church, or just based on the synagogue, you are left without anything. And therefore, the idea of the home, and the idea of study, became terribly important. And that's why Hillel emphasised the need to study, the need for everybody to study, not just the elite, not just the priesthood, not just the rabbis. Everybody has this kind of obligation to study. So in other words, when you look at what Jesus is supposed to have said, I see nothing, nothing in what he is quoted as saying that is not found in Hillel. Whether he consciously cribbed, or whether he wasn't Jesus. It was St. Paul who decided to put early Christianity together.

We don't know, because most of the documentation about Jesus came hundreds of years, came 50, 100, 200, 300 years later, kept on changing, as new documents were being written under new bishops and under new different leaders. And so when you try to peel back the origins, you see how crucial Hillel was in the development of these ideas, whoever expressed them, and wherever they came from. But as I mentioned before, the clash, of course, between Christianity and Judaism came much later. And I also think it doesn't matter whether there was a Jesus, or whether there wasn't a Jesus. The idea is a great idea. The idea of trying to make the world a better place, of people caring for each other, damn it all, that was part of what Moses said, too. There are different ways of expressing it, and this was an attempt to bring some sort of cohesion and a popular system to it. But when I come to the conclusions, I have to say this. I value what all religions do when they try to make this world a better place, and when they try to get people to behave nicer to each other.

And the truth is that all religions agree on the fundamental cause, of the fundamental issue of we've got to make this world better, be good human beings, and the way to do it is by having a spiritual or an intellectual dimension which sets certain value systems, and by having certain religious experiences. But each religion has its own way of doing it, its own rituals, its own myths, its own laws. To me, as with anything in life, as with academic life, you can go for the larger majority of people, or you can go for a small concentrated number of people. And this was a debate that Hillel and his successors were involved with. Do we make the academy open to everybody, or do we make the academy only open to those who are really top rate? If you like, the difference in England between the Ivy League and the state system, or and in America again, between the elite private schools, and the state and national schools. And the answer is you need both. There's no either or in it. And I regard the role of Christianity as being one which is open to a wider audience.

They will look at Judaism, and see as indeed we are, we're heavily nationalised, so to speak. We have a nation, and that matters to us, whereas Christianity has tried to be more universal. But there was a universal side to the Jewish message, too. However, in the end, the major contribution, I think, that Christianity missed out on in its early years was the idea in Judaism



that we are all priests. Every one of us is holy. Every one of us has a direct link to God. Now that's difficult, and it's difficult for most people. And in fact, we see in the rise of Hasidism that many people need the rabbi, or they need somebody as an intermediary. And I think that it was this distinction, which is the core one, which remains to this day, is there a direct hotline, or do we have to go to an intermediary, whether we call this intermediary Jesus, or whether we call it Buddha, whether we call it Mohamed, or whatever you want to do, this is the core difference, in my humble opinion. And at that point, I now hand over to questions, and look forward to answering them.

Q&A and Comments:

Q: Okay, so George Abraham says, "Why was Jesus picked as a poster boy for the new religion?"

A: Well I think the answer was founding the new religion, you've got to find a symbolic leader. You want to find somebody who represents perfection. In the Jewish tradition, we didn't have this idea of perfection. Moses is imperfect. The prophets are imperfect. But Paul decided we need a perfect image. And so in a sense, he concocted this image from earlier people who had different aspects of it. And the question, of course, of Jesus as God came much later.

Q: "How accurate is "Constantine's Sword" "in the story of Helena?"

A: Well, I think "Constantine's Sword" is a great book. It's very well worthwhile reading. And to the best of my knowledge, it's very good. Of course, you know the trouble generally, as there was a famous English philosopher who once said, there's no such thing as history. There are just historians. Everybody tells history in a different way. Of course, you know his story, and her story, but you know, human beings are fallible. We forget things. We remember things differently. We don't know ever what is absolutely true. We still don't know exactly why Napoleon lost the Battle of Waterloo, but there are lots of different explanations given as to why and what contributed. Maybe it was a bad night with Josephine, but who knows? So there is never certainty, and one always goes on questioning. One always goes on looking for more information and different points of view. I can't think of a a better example in Harari's book on homo sapiens, which was a brilliant book. But look how many people disagree with everything he said. So you know, I can't say how accurate. From my experience, I'd say he's pretty accurate. Okay.

Q: "Chunks of various gospels use "almost identical words and stories. "Were they written independently by Matthew, Mark, "Luke, and John, or were they rewritten by an editor "who ensured uniformity? "Do we know when the testaments were canonised?"

A: Well, yes we do. We know that they were not originally written by Mark, Luke, and John and Matthew. Those are names given to them. And no doubt there was editing. There's always editing, and when you copyedit, you forget things. But although there is certain fundamental

similarity that a person emerges, and this person was a great spiritual leader, and he gathered disciples around him, and he promised he would come back a second time, This is something that later editors added in. For example, the idea of a second coming. Nowhere in biblical history, nowhere do you have any idea of a second coming. You have an idea that the Messiah will be new, he will create a new world, a world which everybody will be in peace. Which is why, at the time, the Jews couldn't have accepted that Jesus was the messiah, simply because he died. The Romans were still in charge. The world was not a better place, and nobody ever heard that there'd be a second coming of a Messiah. So for these reasons, a lot of editing went on, and changing went on over the years.

And that's why there are, for example, the Gospel of Thomas, you know, Doubting Thomas, because his gospel is different to the other gospels. And then there are other gospels found, archaeologically, in recent excavations, in the Middle East that show that there were different editions. To be honest, there were different variations, but very minor variations in the text of the Torah, going back a long time. Greek translation, the Septuagint, is very similar, but there are versions, the Samaritan versions, and Jewish versions, and they, in the end, were canonised into one accepted text, and certain books were left out. That took place, both in Judaism and in Christianity.

Ah, Shawna's going to answer this question live. Good for you Shawna. Let's go.

Q: Teddy Herman. "What about magic miracles? "Turning water into wine and these things. "Perhaps Yeshua discovered how to create?"

A: Yes. Look, the answer is that miracles, according to my knowledges, are the least important, least significant form of religious validation. After all, in chapter 13 of Deuteronomy, the text says, if a man arises, and he performs miracles, and these miracles happen, if the message is don't follow the Torah, ignore him. This is just a test of how committed you are to the ideas as opposed to hocus pocus. So the Torah itself recognised that miracles were just reinforcements, but not the core reason for believing or not believing. That wouldn't make sense. It's really credulous people who rely on miracles. You know, I would consider, in a way, the foundation of the state of Israel as a kind of a miracle against all the odds. But it's not hocus pocus. And we all know how easy it is to perform tricks nowadays. There are enough YouTubes showing how to fool people for us to know that it's easy, and everybody's been doing it in all religions for years and years.

And in fact, the Talmud itself talks about plenty of Jews performing magic tricks and miracles and sleights of hands and things like that. So I don't believe in life one should pay any attention to them. They are interesting phenomena in literature, and in the past, of something that you can't explain. And if you can't explain it, then it looks like a miracle. But that's not a criterion. And lots of other people, as I say, at the time, were amazed by faith healers travelling around the country doing all kinds of, you know, Indian rope tricks, and things of that kind to persuade people. Faith healing was very important. Everybody did it.

Q: "Did Christianity," sorry, now we have the next one. David Sefton. "Did Christianity study to the same extent as Judaism does?"

A: Well, yes the scholars did. The scholars were very, very great scholars, some of the greatest scholars out. Go back to the year about 400. 400, you have two famous Christian figures. You have Bishop Cyril in Alexandria, and you have Saint Augustine in Hippo. Saint Augustine was a brilliant scholar, a brilliant philosopher. Greek philosophers even nowadays often go back to Saint Augustine. And he believed in ideas. Didn't like the Jews very much, but then nobody liked the Jews very much in those days. Cyril believed in action. Cyril massacred the Jews of Alexandria. He massacred the pagans, he massacred Greek philosophers. One very famous woman philosopher was dragged through the streets to her death, a Greek philosopher. So you had these two wings, just as you have the two wings nowadays in every religion, between the popular masses, if you like, the Jihadists, and the more intellectual, the more thoughtful, in our own religion, between those people who are more rigid and those people who are more, if you like, open-minded.

And in my years of dealing with interfaith matters, not nearly as much as my brother David, who's brilliant at it, but I always noticed that I had more in common with intelligent thinking, spiritual people, of other religions than I had with a mob in my own. Now the challenge we all face now is how do you raise the level of the masses? But studying was always important. Judaism and Christianity tended to be confined to the elite, and that was also part of Martin Luther's rebellion against Catholicism. Let everybody have access to the Bible. And it was thanks to Gutenberg, of course, that it spread and people could read it for themselves.

"I read 'The Life of Jesus'. 'The last sentence was Jesus' only mission,' sorry, here we are. "I read 'The Life of Jesus', "said the last sentence Jesus' only mission "was be better Jews." Yes, I'm sure if there was a Jesus, that's what he will have said. Absolutely. Because again, as I say, it was St. Paul who took it out of Judaism into a different world.

Q: How acceptable to Christian thought today is your thesis?

A: Well, the trouble is, of course, it depends who you speak to in Christianity. There are lots of books. I was checking a book today on by Daniel Boyarin, who's one of the great Jewish intellectuals on Christianity, he's recognised an expert on Christianity, and there are lots of books that show that there are many Christians who do accept my thesis, many Christians who don't. There are many Christians who are in favour of reform, many Christians who are not. Remember, of course, it was not until Pope John XXIII in 1968, I think it was, who, for the first time, said the Jews today are no longer guilty of killing God, of deicide. Up until that time he said Jews are guilty of deicide, for killing God. Starts strange to me. But even after he said it, even after the Pope said it, there were breakaway groups who said, no, we don't accept these new ideas. And look at the poor Pope today, trying to drag things forward a bit, and there are people who block in his way. So just as in Judaism, you won't get uniformity, neither will you get

uniformity in Christianity, in Christian thought, in any academic thought, if it comes to that. How can I answer here, answer live.

"How do I get a recording this wonderful lecture?" Oh, just go back to the to LU, and they'll be able to give you a copy without any difficulty.

- Jeremy, I'd just like to say to our participants that we are in the process of developing our website, and then all the lectures are going to be accessible.

- Oh, that's brilliant. Thank you so much. So there's your answer. Couldn't get a better answer than that. Answer live.

Q: "How is resurrection explained? "This is central to Christian religion, isn't it?"

A: Yes, for a lot of people take it literally, but there are Christians who take it figuratively. Resurrection does not make sense to me on any logical, rational basis. It's a totally mystical spiritual idea. Either you like it, or you don't like it. And you know, to me, I think Judaism's primary focus is to focus on life now in this world. We don't believe it's a veil of tears, suffer now, and be better later on. We believe in making the best of it now. And if there is an afterlife, those of us who have, if you like, this spiritual identification with the idea of life after death, will find that something comforting and valuable in their lives. And for those who don't, they don't.

Interestingly enough, Maimonides, in his laws of repentance, says specifically, if you believe there's no afterlife, fine, you just die, and that's it. And that's what people mean when they talk about hell. Not there is a hell, you just die. On the other hand, if you believe in spirituality, and a soul, and developing forward, that survives when the body dies. But I don't think anybody literally believes in resurrection in the sense that the body's going to come back to earth after death, but will come back, what? At what age? With their false teeth? With your plastic surgery? At what stage? Grey hair, dyed hair? It doesn't make sense from a rational point of view. Mystically, it has this important message of not only relying on the physical.

Q: "Why did the notion of becoming Christian?"

A: Yeah, well I think the notion of baptism in Christianity came because this was a ceremony of welcoming you into the faith, of saying you are now a holier person, and that was what the mikvah was supposed to do originally. Nowadays, you may know, that Hasidim go to the mikvah every day to start the new day afresh and to feel reborn. But these things are nice ideas. Very rarely do they actually work. Why didn't those who were, yeah, so we've answered that one. So let's see if there are any more. Jill,

Q: "Jesus not acknowledged as a rabbis, "the first hippie rabbi." That's something. Was Jesus a hippie rabbi?

A: Look, there weren't such things in those days. The title rabbi was meaningless in those days. You were a scholar. Hillel, for example, wasn't called Rabbi Hillel. There was a Rabbi Hillel mentioned, but Hillel wasn't known as a rabbi. Titles weren't that important. So the idea of a rabbi basically was at those stages a teacher. Anybody could be a teacher. If you had something to teach, you were a teacher. So in that sense, Jesus was a teacher. But it didn't make sense at that time to talk of rabbis, because they didn't have rabbis in the way that we have rabbis today. But there were plenty of hippie guys down there. Again, go back to the Dead Sea Sects. Answer live.

Q: "Surely our mistake was not to proselytise."

A: That's a brilliant question, because the truth of the matter is, at the time of Hillel and Shammai, they were proselytising. They were proselytising. They still required adherence to Jewish law. Why did we stop proselytising? Because when Constantine became the emperor, Christianity became the religion of the Roman Empire. One of the conditions was Jews who proselytise would be put to death, and anybody who converts will be put to death. And that's the same thing that happened with Islam. Islam also sentences to death. Any Muslim in theory now who converts to another religion in some other parts of the world. And similarly, under Islam, Jews who converted got into terrible trouble. There was the famous case in the 10th century of a vicar in Oxford who fell in love with a Jewish girl. It was a Jewish community in Oxford in those days. And he was burnt at the stake for his pains. So it was too dangerous to convert. We didn't convert in those days. Nowadays, I suppose the answer essentially is whereas once conversion to a religion meant you were part of a religion. This was a time when you had to be part of either Christianity, or Judaism, or Buddhism, or Islam, or whatever, there was no such thing as opting out of your religion. That came with the Enlightenment.

The Enlightenment enabled you to opt out, and therefore people opted out of religion, then sometimes people wanted to marry, not for religious reasons, but for social reasons, for financial reasons. It's very interesting that in England in the 17th and 18th, 17th and 16th century, if a Jewish woman married a Christian, they could claim all her family's money. And similarly under Islam, if a Jewish woman under Islam married a Muslim, she took the family money with them. So these were all reasons why conversion got a bad name. People are converting for the wrong reasons, which is now much as we in principle value converts, and some of the most wonderful people in Judaism, some of the most learned people I know in Judaism are converts. You have no idea how many great ones there are. So we do welcome them, but we only welcome them if they genuinely are passionately committed to the religion. Not if they're doing it just to get a passport, so to speak. So it wasn't our fault that we didn't proselytise more.

Q: "Jesus did add quite a bit to Hillel. "The way to the Father of God is through me."

A: Well, it depends, answer. I don't think that adds, the way to God can be through anybody who helps you get there. Any teacher helps you get to God. That's why Hillel also said get yourself a teacher. Get yourself someone who can lead you there. It's whether this is the only way. It's

whether you can't get to God without Jesus. Now, some Christians who say you can't get to God without Jesus, and that's why the Jews are doomed, and will never get to heaven, or whatever comes forward. So there's a big difference between saying, I can teach you how to be a better person, and somebody who says, and the only way you can get to God is through me. Like the only way you can be a good person is if you're a Christian or a Muslim.

Q: "Why did the manger at Bethlehem come about?"

A: Answer live. Well, many of the customs in Christianity came much, much later. I mean, you know, sort of the manger is not, the way the mangers are built now, at Christmas time, is not a Middle Eastern manger. The Christmas tree is not a tree that was common in Israel at that particular time. And so many of the stories about virgin birth, where would virgin birth come from? They tried to find some source for this in the Torah, where Isaiah says a young girl will produce a great leader, and a great king. But the Bible talks about Alma, a young girl, not a Betulah, a virgin. And so very often people adapted, just as they adapted Isaiah's vision of a wonderful future and a wonderful leader. You know, you hear it all. If you listen to Handel's "Messiah". All that is taken from the prophet, a lot of it from the Isaiah, and twisted it. Instead of Isaiah meaning something within a short term, of a decent leadership, a decent government, not corrupt, they took it to mean something a thousand years later, practically, and took it out of context. But then all religions add things all the time.

One of the great things of Christianity is whether it's in Africa or in Asia or South America, they adopt local customs, local ideas, local even gods, and make saints out of them, in some ways, in order to attract the locals. So this is all part of a reworking, that all religions, I mean we've gone through a dramatic change from a pre-temple religion to a post-temple religion. And we are going through changes in this modern era all the time. What do I think of praying to the rabbi? I don't believe in praying to the rabbi. I think it depends which rabbi. There are some rabbis I think are brilliant, one of the greatest rabbis I ever met was Lubavitcher Rebbe. That doesn't mean to say that I think Chabad are right, but he was a great, amazing man. But I would never have thought that he, I would pray to him. I pray to God, and he would never have asked me to pray to him. But people need things to pray to. They need icons, and they need images, and they need pictures, and they need gurus. But I think ideally the way is to go straight to the Almighty. Develop a personal relationship that works for you.

Q: "How Jesus was different from Old Testament prophets?"

A: Not very much, I would say. Not very much. I think there's a lot in common with them. They wanted the world to be a better place. They hated corruption. They hated misuse of power. And that's why I think the Christians maintain, they call it the Old Testament, whereas they have the New Testament. So their view is you were okay in your barbaric days, you old people, but now we've come since Jesus to a new deal with God, and a New Testament. And that's why, actually, to talk about the Old Testament is an insult to the Jews. But you know, we're not going to make a fuss about it. What are we going to do? Go censoring everything? So they borrowed a lot from

the Old Testament, which is why, for example, they still use Psalms, and why for example, they use so much from our tradition, except, of course, now it's so far removed, they don't know. They don't know that amen means I agree. So you'll have heard of this pastor in dedication in Congress who ended his statement quite seriously by saying, "And so in the name of God of everybody, "I say amen and a-women." And of course that's been over the internet as an example of how ignorant some people are.

Q: "Did Paul's variety end up in Roman Catholicism?"

A: Well, it paved the way. But of course, after Paul it was much after Paul. You've got Christianity splitting into the Western church and the Eastern Church. The Eastern Church consisted of Greek Orthodox, Russian Orthodox, Armenians, Syrians, then you have the Copts, then you have the Western Orthodox, which is Catholicism to begin with. So yes, Constantine it was who changed the name to the Holy Roman Empire. Or he started it? No, I'm sorry, it wasn't Constantine. It was Charlemagne. It was Charlemagne, Charles Le Grand Charles, in about 800, who suddenly called his unified state the Holy Roman Empire. And that's where the Roman Catholicism became the established church in the West. But the others don't accept it. They're alternatives, and sometimes they have fights between each other. I don't know if you are ever in the Church of the Sepulchre in Jerusalem, but there are certain nights of the year when they've had to divide the church up between different religions in Christianity, and they fight each other to gain access to the best positions. Answer live.

Q: "Are you able to tell Spinoza's philosophies?"

A: It so happens that not next week, not next lecture, but my third lecture is going to be about Spinoza, and about this very subject. So if you don't mind holding on till then, you'll hear my opinion of it at that stage.

"In a way we still use intermediary. "When our loved ones die, we ask them to be Meilitz Yosher, "on our behalf, we use," yes, unfortunately we do use intermediaries all the time. Hasidism is based on intermediaries. But the question is, do these intermediaries in any way get in the way of your direct relationship with God? I would not use an expression like Meilitz Yosher. I wouldn't. I would pray directly to God and ask God please, you know, be kind. I don't know that God ever listens to me, but I believe in the direct approach.

Q: "How did Jews who killed Jesus become such a curse? "Why is it a curse to the Jewish people?"

A: Because of Christianity, after Constantine said the Jews were guilty of killing Jesus, and therefore they were guilty of deicide. Now if you are brought up in a religion, which Jesus is a beautiful, lovely child. In the West, fair-haired and blond, this beautiful baby, this image of goodness. And there are some people who wanted to kill him, nevermind it was the Romans who killed him. Nevermind the Jews had no motive to kill him. For 2000 years, they said the

Jews killed Jesus. Of course they hated the Jews. Of course it was a curse. Answer live, Judy.

Q: "What kind of miracles was Jesus said to have formed?"

A: Well he turned, he managed to produce food out of nowhere, loaves and fishes. He managed to cure people who were sick, or of leprosy, and other things like that. You know, you can actually, if you go onto the internet, you can have a list of the cures that Jesus did.

Q: "How can you read and comment on the book, "'The Passover Plot' by Hugh G. Schonfield "that the rise of Christianity as the Romans "began to galvanise their people "because the declining Roman empire?"

A: Answer live. Yes, Hugh Schonfield's "Passover Plot" is another one of the interesting theories about Jesus. There are other books that are very good, I would recommend Hyam Maccoby to you, M-A-C-C-O-B-Y. I know it's one of Trudy's favourites as well. So you know, there are lots of books about different opinions of the Jewish Jesus, or who Jesus was. "

Q: Judaism has never been violent to other faiths, "crusaders, et cetera. "How do you explain the difference when other religions "are supposed to preach love and tolerance? "How do other," yeah.

A: Look, it's true we haven't, we did fight with other pagan religions, back in the days before Christianity. But the truth is that over the last 2000 years, we've never had the power. We've never had the power to fight anybody else. We've always been the underdogs. People have been fighting us. Now I often make the joke, and I mean it as a joke, that if Licinius, who favoured the Jews, back in 320 had, or 24, had defeated Constantine, and made Judaism the religion of the Roman Empire, who knows if we wouldn't have had an Inquisition? 'Cause we also have our fanatics. It's just thank God our fanatics never had the power, and so we never developed that more aggressive side. And thank God in Israel, by and large, that aggression is channelled into self-defense. There are one or two nutcases, there are in every society, one or two nutcases who resort to unwarranted unfair violence. And you know, that's an aspect of some parts of Jewish life today that I despise. It's why I can't support Kahanism, or any kind of ideology like that, which unfortunately is still going strong in certain quarters. Margaret, we've always had the answer, but you can listen to this again. That's coming up again.

Q: "Why does the church emphasise a cross as a symbol "rather than resurrection as a more positive representation "of the religion?"

A: Well, I think good marketing requires simple slogans. Simple slogans and simple images. And the cross initially was supposed to be the cross that Jesus was crucified on with his arms out straight, his head up, and his body down. We know that that was not crucifixion. Crucifixion was a different kind of a model, a different kind of a stake. But it was seen in time to be a good symbol, as was the fish. The fish, which also because of its association with Jesus in the Greek,



became associated with God. It was a good slogan. Might, answer live.

Q: "Might Hillel have played an important part "keeping Jews rather than going "with the new Christian religion?"

A: Unfortunately, we Jews have always been divided, and even a great man like Hillel wasn't capable of getting us all together. We've always been an argumentative sectarian group of people. That's our strength, and it's our weaknesses.

A: "Are the Dead Sea Scrolls giving some real truth "about history of the Jews?"

A: They're giving a lot of information that sheds a lot of light. So if you really want to know about the origin, that's how you'll find out more about the origins. But if you want to know what Judaism or Christianity really say, you have to look at their holy texts.

Q: "Given Jesus was a Jew, why'd the church "become so anti-Semitic?"

A: The church became anti-Semitic because we refused to accept Jesus as the Messiah. The Islam hates nowadays 'cause we don't accept Mohamed. Unfortunately, we are called the stubborn Jews. That's what we were called by Chaucer, and by Shakespeare. And they think they're the only way. And we say, I'm sorry governor, we've got our own, and we're sticking to it.

Q: "What is the religious and political "back to aspirations that Julian the Apostate?"

A: Well, Julian the Apostate was the sole Christian emperor who was good to the Jews, really good to the Jews, because he didn't agree with Christianity, and he didn't like the way Christianity was trying to impose itself on everybody else. He believed in a free for all, like Alexander the Great, like Cyrus the Great of Persia. He believed in freedom of religion, and that's why he was called the Apostate. But it's only the Christians who called him Apostate. I wouldn't call him, I'd call him a great guy. Answer live.

Q: "What about the role of Mary?"

A: Well, I think the role of Mary was created in order to appeal to those who worship the mother of heaven. Astarti, Ashtoreth, and became this figure, and to appeal to women, and to give women a role within the Jewish, within the Jewish, that was a Freudian slip, because in one way, I wish there'd have been more of an equivalent in Judaism. Not for worship, but to represent the interests of women. But she was supposed to be the person who could represent the female. And when Christianity became very, very monastic and insisted, unlike Judaism, on celibacy as being an ideal state, and therefore had to separate the monks from the nuns, she became the representative of the women and the ideal of the women's side of Christianity.

Q: "Josephine was not Napoleon's wife at the time of Waterloo." Answer live.

A: No, that's quite right. She wasn't. He'd already sort of married the Hartsburg, but it's this kind of funny, humorous myth that he had a bad night with Josephine. Although he kept friends with Josephine after. And some people do believe he went on sleeping with Josephine after. But you know, that's another issue. But many of my remarks are often meant humorously, and not to be taken too literally.

Q: Let's go down to, "Why do you think Christianity "became so successful and why Judaism didn't?"

A: Yes, because I think Christianity was more flexible. It adopted local customs. It was easier to become a Christian. And it was, in the same way, the reformed Judaism in America became much more easy for so many more people than the Orthodox.

Q: "Given the parallels with Hillel, "are there also parallels to the story "for the three days of the Isiah, "and other in the Nevi'im?"

A: Ah yes. Yes, most definitely there are parallels because they borrowed so much from the prophets. So I would agree with you. No question at all. Marcel Rogers.

Q: "When did the study of Kabbalah start "and how did it all this affect Torah studies?"

A: Look, this is another very important issue. It's also on my list of lectures in February, I think it is, on the Kabbalah, how it is, how it started, where it came from, and what its impact is on us today. So if you hang in there, I'll get an answer to you in a couple of weeks time.

Q: "Unrelated question, can you comment "on the Gematria of 2021? "Is there any hope for this year?" Answer live.

A: Gematria is fun, but I don't take it very seriously 'cause the Gematria for a judge is also Gematria for an idiot in Hebrew. Shofet and mishpat. Gematrias are fun, but I don't think they predict anything. I wouldn't pay too much attention. And I'm prepared to bet that the Messiah is not coming this year. Next one.

"Nostra Aetate 65." Answer live. Thank you very much. Yes, quite right. I don't always remember when I speak ad lib the exact date, but thanks for correcting me. Absolutely right. But I think '68 was the end of the Vatican Council, if I'm not mistaken.

Q: "My understanding were there any independent "type of preachers during the time of Jesus "who made Jesus mostly influential?"

A: Well, the straight answer is he had a good PR man. You know, like some rabbis have very good PR men, and they get people who work very hard, and have whole offices, to sell

themselves and do it. And he did a good job. I don't think it's any more than that. I think there were many other people at the same time who could just as well have been and said what Jesus did and said. So yes, we answered Victoria Dorosh. I've done that. Done.

My understanding is there many independent type preachers? Yes, done that one.

Q: "How do you account for those miracles "mentioned the New Testament?"

A: I think I've mentioned that one. Anybody can perform a miracle. Anybody can become a magician. Anybody can do tricks, anybody can persuade. Whole people are being persuaded. Look how Hitler managed to persuade everybody. So I don't reckon that miracles count, and we don't consider miracles as being a condition of belief. The condition of belief is loyalty to a moral, ethical behavioural system.

Q: "As far as resurrection, "what happens to souls when Yeshua comes?"

A: I've absolutely no idea. I just know that they're not going to come back on earth looking the way they were when they were on earth. But I honestly don't know. And nobody's been there and come back.

Q: "Perhaps the body of Jesus removed from the tomb "under Roman command to reveal answer place."

A: Look, it's perfectly possible. Yes, you know. Perfectly possible. There are plenty of theories. I wasn't there. I don't know. I just take what looks logical, because I just don't think at the time of Jesus' death there were enough people who would've turned up to make it a shrine to be a challenge to the Roman Empire. Julian Apostate, we've answered that. Oh, I'm just going back again. So I guess we've come to the end.

- Jeremy, thank you very much for another outstanding lecture.

- Oh, thank you. My pleasure.

- About that. I look forward to seeing you next week. We'll go for a walk.

- That will be lovely. Me too.

- In the big apple. Yeah. Thank you very, very much. Thank you once again. Thank you everybody for joining us, and we look forward to seeing everybody soon.

- Thank you.

- So to those in England and South Africa, we say goodnight. And to those in the States, all of

you, enjoy the rest of your day. And a million thanks, Jeremy. another brilliant, brilliant presentation.

- Thanks.