



## Lesson Plan for the Fifth Grade

# Maccabees and Hellenists

The above terms characterize two distinct groups within the Jewish People – Maccabees and Hellenists. The two groups were engaged in a struggle over a political principle and perhaps even a military principle. We shall examine the claims of each group: why follow their path, and what values underpin each group's approach. We shall examine today's reality, and whether such divisions exist in our times as well.

### 1. Introduction to Maccabees and Hellenists

Backdrop to the Maccabean Revolt: the social, socio-economic characteristics and values of the Maccabees and Hellenists.





2. Outbreak of the revolt and figure of Matityahu – story and dilemmas.

We shall read a text from the Book of Maccabees which tells the story of the outbreak of the revolt. The story is cut off at different points at which the students must voice their opinion as to what they would have done under such circumstances, and what they think of what the players in the original story did.

3. The Hellenists on trial: Evaluating claims for and against Hellenism

4. Symbols of our culture

Examining the influence of Hebrew culture and Western consumer culture on our lives today, through the classification of symbols and brands.





# Maccabees and Hellenists

## Process

1. Background of the Maccabean Revolt, and the different groups among the people We shall divide the class into groups. Each group will receive factual texts with information on different aspects of Judean society during the revolt period. Historical, political, cultural, religious, social and economic background. Each group will read the texts, and answer the following questions:
  - What were the divisions that existed in the above areas?
  - What were the different groups or positions that arise from reading the text?

### Historical and political background

In 332 B.C., Alexander the Great captured Judea from the Persians, and Greek customs and ideas began to penetrate the country (such as establishment of the Polis – the ancient Greek city-state). After Alexander's death, conflict began among his heirs, the House of Ptolemy based in Egypt, and the House of Seleucus based in Syria. In wake of the conflict between the House of Seleucus and the House of Ptolemy, and the rise of Rome – a new power with an interest in weakening the Seleucids, Antiochus IV tries to create unity in his kingdom, and loyalty among his subjects. In order to secure loyalty Antiochus, ruler of Judea, intervenes in the appointment of the high priest, and imposes restrictions on worship. A rebellion of the Ptolemaics, assisted by the people, was ruthlessly repressed. Greek rule was then reestablished in Jerusalem with its own government institutions; the temple mount is opened for pagan worship, and persecution was inaugurated with decrees against the Jewish religion.





## Religious and cultural backdrop

A deep contradiction exists between the pagan Greek religion and the monotheistic (believed in one god) Jewish religion. Classical Greek philosophy and culture had great influence on the cultures of the Ancient Near East – with elements such as the democratic idea, aestheticism in the arts, architecture and science. However, Hellenistic culture (the later, simplistic version of Greek culture), centered on materialism and hedonism, clashed with Jewish (mainly Hasidic) culture with its foundations on moral and spiritual values. The Greek religion had many gods but no laws for everyday life, except for the worship of gods with human characteristics. As opposed to this, the Jewish religion applies to all aspects of life and instructs how to conduct everyday life. The Greek and Hellenistic culture emphasizes the body, its development through sports, pleasures of the table, bathhouses, etc. Part of the Sadducee sect (members of the priesthood in Judaism) members of the upper class who wanted to be close to the rulers welcomed the materialistic culture, with the feasts and gymnasiums (spectator sports). At the outset, the Hellenistic government was tolerant towards the Jewish religion, as with most of the provinces under its rule. Later on, however, the political and social contradictions began to polarize. At this stage, the government began restricting the practice of Judaism.





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## General social background

Even before Greek rule, in Jewish society there were the rich and the poor, villager-farmers and the city dwellers of Jerusalem including priests who conducted the temple worship and artisans. However, gaps between the classes were small, and there was a great deal of mutual assistance. Some of the members of the upper class city dwellers learned Greek, and sought to become integrated in the ruling culture. The Hellenistic government wanted a more efficient method of taxation, and from among the Jews included the upper class in collecting taxes. Each region was required to pay a certain sum. The difference between the sum paid to the government and that collected from the residents was taken by the superintendent. Thus, a new status of Jews collaborating with the government was created – Jews who exploited their brethren. A gap was formed between the wealthy elite of Jerusalem – the developed urban center in which the Greeks and Hellenists resided, and commoners – small artisans in the city and simple farmers in the country.



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## 2. Characterization

Each group shall receive two characters, or a table with a column for Maccabees and a column for Hellenists, and an assemblage of qualities,

Maccabee	Hellenist

external characteristics and customs. Each group will be asked to classify the characteristics.

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Attends the theater</li> <li>● Attends feasts</li> <li>● Believes in G-d</li> <li>● Goes to temple</li> <li>● Rich</li> <li>● Poor</li> <li>● Makes sacrifices to the gods</li> <li>● Associated with the government</li> <li>● Hedonist, likes the easy life</li> <li>● Practical</li> <li>● Man of principle</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Hebrew speaker</li> <li>● Greek speaker</li> <li>● Open</li> <li>● Rigid</li> <li>● Loyal</li> <li>● Adaptive</li> <li>● Farmer</li> <li>● Simple man</li> <li>● Government official</li> <li>● Villager</li> <li>● City dweller</li> </ul> |
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### 3. Discussion:

- How did you classify?
- How are the Maccabees characterized? How are the Hellenists characterized?
- Which of the two types do you identify with more? If you had lived in that era, which group would you have chosen to belong to? Why?



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## What would we have done in their place?

We shall tell the story of Matityahu, while stopping to ask the students how they would have acted.

### 1 Maccabees, Chapter 2

Matityahu answered in a loud voice: Although all the Gentiles in the king's realm obey him, so that they forsake the religion of their ancestors and consent to the king's orders, yet I and my sons and my kindred will keep to the covenant of our ancestors.

Heaven forbid that we should forsake the law and the commandments. We will not obey the words of the king by departing from our religion in the slightest degree.

As he finished saying these words, a certain Jew came forward in the sight of all to offer sacrifice on the altar in Modein according to the king's order.

When Matityahu saw him, he was filled with zeal; his heart was moved and his just fury was aroused; he sprang forward and killed him upon the altar. At the same time, he also killed the messenger of the king who was forcing them to sacrifice, and he tore down the altar. Thus he showed his zeal for the law, just as Phinchas did with Zimri, son of Salu.

Then Matityahu cried out in the city: Let everyone who is zealous for the law and who stands by the covenant follow me! Then he and his sons fled to the mountains, leaving behind in the city all their possessions.

At that time many who sought righteousness and justice went out into the wilderness\* to settle there, they and their children, their wives and their animals, because misfortunes pressed so hard on them.



### Stage 1 – the king's decree

Background: Matityahu, Maccabee, son of a priestly family, lives in a small town.

Matityahu is opposed to Hellenism and pagan worship. Greek soldiers come to the village and require Matityahu to make sacrifices in the shrine.

### What should Matityahu do? And why?

- Agree to perform the sacrifices – more important than risking death or imprisonment.
- Try to evade them and escape.
- Come out in the open against the Greek directive, thus putting himself and his family at risk, and starting a rebellion

### Stage 2 – Matityahu's resistance

#### 1 Maccabees, Chapter 2

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- What did Matityahu choose to do? Why?
- Had you been one of the Modein people, what would you have done?



Stage 3 – Response of one of the villagers

1 Maccabees, Chapter 2

As he finished saying these words, a certain Jew came forward in the sight of all to offer sacrifice on the altar in Modein according to the king's order.

When Matityahu saw him, he was filled with zeal; his heart was moved and his just fury was aroused...

Literal analysis

- What has come over Matityahu? What is meant by “filled with zeal”? What are the emotions described in the text?
- What is meant by “his heart (literally in Hebrew source: kidneys) was moved”? Where are the kidneys located? What other expression (regret, remorse – *mussar klayot*) is connected with the kidneys? What is the connection? (Moral injustice)
- What is meant by “his just fury was aroused”? Is the anger justified? Why? ?

Dilemma

What should Matityahu do when he sees another person doing the opposite of what he said?

- Let everyone do as they please – let him make sacrifices at the altar.
- Denounce the man, and tell him what he thinks of his deeds.
- Kill him for betraying the Jewish faith and words of the leader (Matityahu).
- Kill him and destroy the altar so no one else can continue sacrificing.

### Stage 4 – Matityahu’s response to nonobservance of his words

#### 1 Maccabees, Chapter 2

...he sprang forward and killed him upon the altar. At the same time, he also killed the messenger of the king who was forcing them to sacrifice, and he tore down the altar.

Thus he showed his zeal for the law, ...

Then Matityahu cried out in the city: Let everyone who is zealous for the law and who stands by the covenant follow me! Then he and his sons fled to the mountains, leaving behind in the city all their possessions.

At that time many who sought righteousness and justice went out into the wilderness\* to settle there, they and their children, their wives and their animals, because misfortunes pressed so hard on them.

- What did Matityahu do? Why do you think he did it?
- What does the word “zeal” mean? Is this a positive or negative concept in the text?
- Why did Matityahu flee? What is the meaning of his actions? What will happen to him if he does not flee?
- Why does Matityahu choose to call more people?
- 

What would you have done as Jews present there, hearing Matityahu’s words?

- Wait for Matityahu to leave and rebuild the altar, in order not to anger the Greek government.
- Hide at home and wait for the commotion to end.
- Join Matityahu and his sons in the revolt.





### Stage 5 – concluding discussion

- How is Matityahu characterized? What kind of a man is he?
- Was Matityahu justified in his actions? In refusing to sacrifice, killing a Jew, killing a Greek soldier, and calling for rebellion?
- What would you have done otherwise?
- Is zeal a good or a bad trait?
- Are there things important enough for us to risk our lives for and even harm others in order to protect? What are they?



# The Maccabean Revolt – when will you join the revolt?

## Goals

1. Introduction to the Maccabean period and background to the outbreak of the revolt.
2. Dealing with the question of starting a revolt and its price.

## Process

The lesson is conducted as a simulation of the Jews' lives during the Greek rule over the Land of Israel. The class shall be seated in a circle. Mattresses or pillows are laid within the circle. Whoever chooses to join the revolt goes to sit on the floor.

Explaining the process to the students: you are Jewish farmers living in Judea under Greek rule. The Greek leadership is rather unstable, but they are the rulers. In recent years, a social change had occurred, with leadership passing from the temple priesthood to rich Hellenistic Jews who made their money mainly by exploiting poor farmers. After each episode, you will be asked if you want to take part in the Maccabean Revolt that is just beginning. You must decide whether yes or no. Whoever joins becomes part the Maccabean group and may convince others to join him.



**First episode: Religious decrees**

The Greek ruler has issued a statement forbidding the practice of Judaism. It is thus forbidden to practice the religious precepts (*mitzvot*) of circumcision, study or teach Torah, make sacrifices in the temple, and eat kosher food. Matityahu the Hasmonean, a priest from the city of Modein, murders a government official and several Hellenistic Jews who come to make sacrifices to the Greek God Zeus. Matityahu and his sons run for the hills and call upon whoever supports their cause to join them.

**1. Will you join the revolt of the Hasmonean family?****Second episode: Appointment of the high priest**

Extreme Hellenists from among the rich people of Jerusalem and close to the Greek administration brought about the removal of Jason the High Priest, leader of the temple, who tried to prevent any major changes to it. In his place they appointed Menelaus, a Hellenist from outside of the priestly lineage. Menelaus introduces worship of the Greek gods into the temple, and steals its ancient treasures, taking them to his private home to accumulate personal wealth.

**2. Will you join the revolt and come out against the rich Hellenists?**



### **Third episode: New taxes**

The commissioner on behalf of the Greeks (himself a Hellenistic Jew) imposed new additional taxes on the farmer class (who can barely carry this burden anyway). From now on they will have to hand about 40% of their harvest over to him. It is known that he plans to sell the taxed grain and build himself a new opulent home.

**3. Will you join the revolt and come out against the corrupt Hellenistic commissioner?**

### **Fourth episode: Religious but not political independence**

After a series of battles and the recapture of Jerusalem from the Greeks, the Greek ruler offers Judah Maccabee an agreement according to which he would cancel the religious decrees, and in exchange get recognition for the Greek administration's political authority. Many accept the agreement; however, Judah Maccabee is opposed to it, claiming that they must strive for political independence, that the government in Judea must be Jewish and not Greek.

**4. Would you join the revolt and go to war against the Greeks despite the proposed compromise? Would you leave the rebels (had you already joined them)?**



### **Fifth episode: Change of government and corruption of the priesthood**

A change of the Greek government leads to repealment of the proposed compromise agreement with Judah. The Hellenistic high priest receives the go-ahead from the Greek administration to act against the Hasmoneans, and executes 60 Jews belonging to a fervent sect in Jewish society (Hasidic zealots). Judah's people then kill 50 of the high priest's people.

#### **5. Will you join the revolt and come out against the Greeks and the Hellenists?**

**Conclusion:** As we all know, the Maccabees defeated the Greek forces, at the cost of long years of war in Judea. The period of Hasmonean rule was one of economic and cultural prosperity for the Jewish People. It ended after about 130 years, with the death of King Herod and the Roman conquest of Judah.

### **Concluding discussion**

- Who did the Jews fight against?
- What were the Jews fighting for?
- In your opinion, was the revolt justified?
- What made you join the revolt? Why didn't you join previously?

## The Hellenists on trial

- Divide the class into two groups: Maccabees and Hellenists (there may also be a small group of judges).
- The groups will be given several informative texts, on the group's social and ideological characteristics. Each group must write claims for and against Hellenism and the Hellenists.
- We shall conduct a trial in which each group will state its case. The group of judges must state its opinion on the claims.
- Texts from the previous lessons may be used.

### Hellenization – Wikipedia

Term for the process in which a person converts his culture and sometimes his religion as well to the Hellenistic culture (whose origin is in Ancient Greece (religion, language and customs)).

In connection with the Jewish People, the first significant encounter between the two cultures took place during the period of Alexander the Great. During the Hellenistic Period in the Land of Israel many families became Hellenized, even families from among the high priesthood. Some claim that the high priest Menelaus along with his brother Simon and the two rulers of Israel closest to him in the dynasty, Jason and Alcimus, are the key figures identified with the term Hellenization and its different meanings in Jewish tradition. The term is highly familiar from the period of [https://he.wikipedia.org/wiki/אַנטיוכוס\\_השלישי](https://he.wikipedia.org/wiki/אַנטיוכוס_השלישי) Antiochus III, ruler of the Seleucid Empire and the Maccabean revolt against Seleucid rule in the days of the Maccabean Revolt.



Among the Diasporas Jews of that period, for a significant period of time, conscious Hyalinization was considered a negligible phenomenon. Since the Jews were known for observing the Sabbath, they were exempted from all urban celebrations connected with pagan worship, abstain from forbidden foods and even oil from gentiles, sent funds to Jerusalem and heeded to the word of the King of Judea.

Over the years, one may detect different signs indicating the process of Hyalinization and assimilation: changes of first names and languages, translation of the Torah into Greek, Jewish literature in Greek, adoption of Greek customs, and overall cultural assimilation of diaspora Jewry. These “light” Jews under the influence of Greek philosophy took a rather casual approach towards the Torah and its precepts. They would find in the legends and precepts inferences to philosophical and moral issues, to the extent that they no longer thought it necessary to take the words of the Torah at face value and observe the precepts according to the Halacha.

The external book: Wisdom of [https://he.wikipedia.org/wiki/חכמת\\_שלמה](https://he.wikipedia.org/wiki/חכמת_שלמה)

Solomon denounces them (Wisdom of Solomon 2, 7, 18).

Tiberius Alexander (Nephew of Philon) [https://he.wikipedia.org/wiki/פילון\\_האלכסנדרוני](https://he.wikipedia.org/wiki/פילון_האלכסנדרוני) and Antiochus are examples of assimilated Jews.

Hyalinization was expressed in the desire to emulate the Greek lifestyle, Greek philosophy and wisdom, development of aesthetic sense, and physical culture and sports, as opposed to the wisdom of Judaism and its values, and precepts between a person and his fellow man. In the area of material culture too, changes occurred in wake of Hyalinization, indications to which can be found in Synagogues and statues of that era. Hyalinization is the result of a meeting of cultures: The culture of Ancient Greece when the meeting in that period created a flocking of Jews to the Greek religion and culture on different levels.



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Hyalinization was prevalent mainly among the affluent, aristocratic urban classes of the Jewish People. Among villagers and common folk, this outlook was much less popular. This inner tension between the Hellenists and traditionalists was among the main reasons for the outbreak of the Maccabean Revolt against Hellenistic rule in the Land of Israel.



# Hyalinization and the influence of foreign culture – classification of symbols

**Objective:** Examining the influence of Hebrew culture and Western consumer culture on our lives today, through the classification of symbols and brands.

## Process

Each group/student is given a page with Jewish and Israeli symbols and Western symbols.

Next to each symbol write:

- Whether you know the symbol.
- The meaning of the symbol.
- Classify according to: Mine – belonging to me; not mine and not belonging to me.

## Discussion:

1. How many symbols of mine are Jewish–Hebrew and how many not?
2. Which symbols am I more familiar with, and which ones less?
3. Do we preserve our own culture or are we influenced by other cultures?
4. What are the pros and cons of global cultural influence?





## Symbols

See the following table of symbols. Examine whether you know the symbol. Under each symbol, write what it symbolizes. Then, sort them according to what belongs to me/is connected to me – what does not belong to me/is not connected to me.

1 	2 	3 
4 	5 	6 
7 	8 	9 
10 	11 	12 





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 <p>19</p>	 <p>20</p>	 <p>21</p>
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