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The Age of Hellenism

Diverse Strategies for Survival

textbook pages 16–27

Chapter Overview

The lure and force of Hellenism polarized the Jews of Israel. The three alternative responses were resistance, assimilation, and accommodation. For the most part, the Diaspora Jews chose to accommodate to Hellenism while maintaining their religious identity and their ties to the Jews of Judea. While ultimately regaining their independence under the Hasmoneans, the ongoing influence of Hellenism in the region remained a challenge to the Jewish state.

core concepts

- The Jews responded to the challenge of Hellenism with diverse strategies: resistance, assimilation, and accommodation.
- We continue to use diverse strategies in facing the challenges of our own time.

Learning Objectives



Students will be able to

- Identify at least two temptations that existed for Jews to adopt Hellenistic ways.
- Describe at least two things that helped the Jews resist the temptation to assimilate.
- Apply what they have learned to explain how our lives today mirror those of our ancestors.



Teaching Opportunities

Getting Started

Ask your class to imagine that a new principal in their school now requires all students to wear the school colors—orange and blue—to school every day. Divide students into three groups: resisters, assimilators, adapters. Their positions are as follows: The first group ignores, or resists, following the ruling. The second group agrees to follow the ruling and blend in, or assimilate. And the third group is willing to compromise, or adapt.

Give each group five minutes to develop an explanation in support of the position it represents. Bring the class back together and have a volunteer from each group explain its reasoning. (*Resisters: Don't want to give up their individuality and become like everyone else. Assimilators: Don't want to stand out or look like they're troublemakers, want to get good grades. Adapters: Want to get along and show respect for the principal without completely losing their individuality, for example, wear one orange and blue article of clothing.*)

Ask class members: Which group do you think you would join? Why?

Tell students that in this chapter they will learn some of the ways the Jews responded to the challenge of maintaining their identities while under the control of a foreign ruler.

pages 16–17 **Timeline**

Invite students to read the timeline. Ask: Which timeline entry includes information about a popular Jewish holiday? (*164 BCE, Maccabees capture Jerusalem from Seleucids; Temple purified and rededicated*) What holiday is it? (*Hanukkah*) Invite students to share what they know about the holiday, in particular, the story of Hanukkah. Tell them that they will learn more about Hanukkah as they read this chapter.

page 19 **You Are There: Resistance, Assimilation, or Adaptation**

Before students respond to the questions in this activity, ask them to think back to the opening activity for the chapter, when they considered resisting, assimilating, or adapting in regard to the issue of the dress code. Ask: Did you have strong feelings about the position you took on that issue? Why or why not? How might you have felt if you had lived in Judea and had to choose an approach to Hellenism?

page 20 **The Greek Torah: Septuagint**

Ask for volunteers to debate the question “Should the entire synagogue Shabbat prayer service—including the Torah and *haftarah* readings—be conducted in



English?” Have one student or group of students represent the all-English position, another student or group represent the part-English/part-Hebrew position, and a third student or group represent the all-Hebrew position.

After each debater/group presents, invite the rest of the class to pose questions. (For example, students might ask the all-English group if they are concerned about the Jewish people losing their knowledge of Hebrew.) Finally, open the discussion for all students to share their personal points of view.

page 21 **Conflict in Judea**

Focus students on this passage: “Some of the younger priests neglected their Temple duties, preferring to take part in the neighboring athletic competitions.” To help students understand how the tension between religious and secular commitments continues to this day, present this modern example: In 1965 the Los Angeles Dodgers were in the World Series and wanted Sandy Koufax, their ace pitcher, to start Game 1. But the game fell on Yom Kippur and Koufax decided to spend the day in synagogue.

Koufax did what he believed was the right thing; his manager and teammates supported him. But the day after the first game, Don Riley, a columnist for the *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, wrote a column that criticized Koufax for his decision. Some felt the column was antisemitic. Suddenly everyone was talking about the conflict of religion and sports.

Conduct a radio talk show on the subject with one student as the host, another as Sandy Koufax, and the rest of the students as listeners who call in. Alternatively, have students write a newspaper article or letter to the editor about Koufax’s decision. Students may want to take the position of a sports-writer, rabbi, teammate, coach, Jewish fan, or non-Jewish fan.

You may want to suggest to students who are sports fans that they research information on Koufax and on Riley’s editorial. (*Jewish Heroes, Jewish Values* [Behrman House, 1996] has a section on Koufax; see pages 12–15.)

page 21 **Map: The Diaspora During the Hellenistic Period**

Have students compare this map to a modern map of the Middle East. Ask: To which modern-day country does each arrow point? (*arrow pointing at Athens: Greece; at Perga and Edessa: Turkey; at Alexandria: Egypt*)

page 23 **Sound Familiar? Corruption in High Places**

Ask: What are some of the possible qualities that might be indications of a leader’s trustworthiness? (*honesty, integrity, truthfulness, uprightness, reliability, sincerity, authenticity, and genuineness*)

page 24 **Ḥanukkah**

Remind students that there were no electric lights in the ancient Temple. The original menorah was at least the size of a person and gave off enough light to

illuminate a very large room. (The Torah's instructions for creating the menorah are given in Exodus 25:31–40.)

You may want to take your students into the synagogue sanctuary and show them the *ner tamid* (eternal light) above the Holy Ark. Explain that all synagogues have a light above the Ark that remains lit twenty-four hours a day. These eternal lights are reminders of the menorah in the ancient Temple and of God's constant presence.

page 26 **Photograph: Ancient Coin**

After discussing the photograph on page 26, have students create coins for the modern State of Israel. Bring in strong aluminum foil and toothpicks and have the children etch the coins, or have them draw the coins using construction paper and markers or crayons. If you have some Israeli coins, bring them to class and use them to introduce the activity.

page 27 **Then & Now**

Possible answers to the first question: *There's so much commercial attention to and public celebration of Christmas that it can be difficult to resist the desire to join in; some families include people of different faiths; being different is not always given the consideration it deserves by others.*

Note: The issue of interfaith families can be a sensitive one. You may want to ask your rabbi or director of education to participate in this discussion.

Possible answers to the second question: *Learning about Jewish customs and traditions can help you make choices you feel good about. Make plans ahead of time that will help you celebrate Hanukkah in a fun way. For example, plan a latke party with a contest to see who can spin the dreidel the longest. Invite guests to bring latkes made of different foods—white potatoes, sweet potatoes, zucchini squash, turnips—even cheese!*



Family Connection

Have students discuss the “Then & Now” activity with their families. Invite them to share the ideas and points of view raised by their families. Alternatively, you may want to invite parents to join in the class discussion or to meet as a group with your rabbi or director of education.