

# Intertestamental Period

428–3 BC

After the death of Artaxerxes I (464–424 BC)—the Persian king who appoints both Ezra and Nehemiah to their tasks in Jerusalem—the Jews in Persia, Mesopotamia, Judea, and Egypt continue to live under Persian rule until 331 BC, when Alexander the Great brings the Persian Empire to an end. However, Alexander rules only until 323 BC. After his death his generals fight wars that break up Alexander’s empire into several pieces. For a time the Jews in Palestine live under the rule of one of these successor kingdoms, the Ptolemaic kingdom, which rules from Egypt. Eventually Palestine is wrested from Egyptian control by another successor kingdom, the Seleucid kingdom, centered in Syria. One of the Seleucid kings, Antiochus IV Epiphanes (r. 175–164 BC), will seek to force the Jews in Palestine to worship the Greek gods, sparking a rebellion whose most successful leader is Judas, known as Maccabeus, meaning “Hammer.” The Maccabees—or, more properly, the Hasmoneans—establish an independent Jewish kingdom ruled by priests of the Levitical house of Hasmon. In 63 BC this kingdom is brought to an end when the Roman general Pompey the Great conquers Jerusalem, and Palestine is incorporated into the Roman Empire. Eventually the Roman Senate appoints Herod the Great as king of Judea (appointed in 39 BC; conquers Jerusalem in 36 BC; dies in early 1 BC). It is this Herod who is ruling Judea on behalf of the Romans when Jesus is born.