Alexander the Great died at the age of 32 in 324 B.C. As he left no heirs, his kingdom was divided up among five generals or commanders of his army. Antigonus obtained Asia; Seleucus got Babylon and other nations that were there; Lysimachus ruled over the Hellespont and Cassander over Macedonia while Ptolemy received Egypt. Antigonus Cyclops, the one-eyed ruler of Asia was defeated in battle against the other members of the Diadochi (successors to Alexander) and killed. Seleucus Nicator, ruler of Babylon or Syria obtained Antigonus' territory. He founded the city of Antioch in Syria in 300 B.C. and made it his capital.

Antiochus I, the grandson of Seleucus, who was called The God, fell into succession as ruler and he was succeeded by his son Antiochus II and then by Antiochus III also known as Antiochus The Great. Seleucus Soter, son of Antiochus the Great, succeeded his father. Upon his death, his brother, Antiochus Epiphanes took the kingdom.

Antiochus Epiphanes came into Jerusalem pretending peace and took the city by treachery. He left the temple bare, taking away the golden candle sticks, the golden altar, the table of shewbread, the veils and all the temple's secret treasures. He pillaged the whole city, taking some of the people captive and killing others including women and children. He burned down the finest buildings, and overthrew the city walls.

Then he built an altar upon God's Altar and killed pigs upon it. Then he forbid the Jews to worship in their own way, but to worship the Greek idols and gods. He made the Jews build temples and raise idols in every village and city and offer pigs on the altars every day. He forbid them to circumcise their sons and threatened punishment. Their torments were great and they were beaten with rods until their bodies were torn to pieces and they were crucified. Women and their sons whom they had circumcised were strangled.

Their was a man named Mattathias, the great-grandson of Asamoneus, a priest. Mattathias had five sons, John, Simon, Judas, Eleazar and Jonathan. A person who was appointed by the king or Antiochus Epiphanes came to Mattathias who lived in Modin, a small town about 17 miles northwest of Jerusalem, and wanted Mattathias to begin the sacrifices so that the others would follow his example. Mattathias adamantly refused to do so. Then one of the Jews came to offer the sacrifice as ordered by Antiochus. Mattathias, in great anger, went at this man with his sons with their swords and killed him. Mattathias and his sons fled into the hills and hid in caves. Other devout Jews began to join them and the revolt began.

Mattathias, who was an old man, died the following year and the leadership fell to his third son, Judas. Judas obtained the surname of Maccabaeus and was transferred to the other members of the group. It may have come from the word maqqaba which means hammer. Under Judas' leadership the revolt grew and he soon had an army of sufficient size the meet the Syrians in open battle.

Judas and his army was able to retake Jerusalem and remove the statue of Zeus from the Holy of Holies and all the pagan implements of sacrifice. The temple was then purified and daily sacrifices and worship were restored. This became a joyous celebration and an annual affair knows as Hanukkah or Feast of Dedication. John 10: 22. "Now it was the Feast of Dedication in Jerusalem, and it was winter."

Antiochus Epiphanes died shortly afterwards and his general, Lysias, seized the government and ruled in the name of Antiochus' nine-year old son Antiochus Eupator. The young ruler on the
advice of Lysias granted the Jews complete religious liberty. This child king was killed by his cousin who then took the crown as Demetrius Soter. Although Demetrius granted certain religious liberty, he approved of Alcimus as High Priest who was loathed by the Jews because he was completely Greek in his thinking and sympathies. The Jews were too few in number to continue to stand up against the larger kingdom of the Seleucids. So the Jews turned to the Romans. The Roman Senate granted independence to Judea with the idea that it would become a buffer between the Syrian and Egyptian realms.

Judas Maccabaeus was killed in battle against the Syrians. Now the youngest son of Mattathias became High Priest, after Alcimus had fled Jerusalem. John the oldest of the brothers had been taken prisoner and killed and Eleazar, the next to the youngest, had been crushed to death by an elephant. When Jonathan was murdered by Tryphon, a pretender to the Syrian throne, the only remaining son, Simon, took over the leadership of Judea. After King Demetrius II granted the Jews complete independence, the people proclaimed Simon Maccabaeus and his descendants High Priest and ethnarchs until "a faithful prophet should arise."

John Hyrcanus, Simon's son, succeeded him as High Priest and etharch of Judea. Hyrcanus extended his dominion by military power. He conquered Samaria and Idumea and left a large kingdom to his son, Judas Aristobulus. He held the throne for only one year and was succeeded by his youngest brother Alexander Jannaeus. He increased the size of his domain to the east of the Jordan River and at his death the Promised Land had been restored to almost its original size.

When Jannaeus died the reigns of government passed into the hands of his wife, Salome Alexandra. She appointed one of her sons, Hyrcanus II as High Priest, not only because he was the oldest but also because he did not care to meddle in politics and permitted the Pharisees to do everything. His brother, Aristobulus, was not happy with this situation and resolved to seize the government for himself. Eventually, the two reached an agreement that Aristobulus should be king, and Hercaenus a private man.

Hyrcanus II had a friend who was an Idumean. His name was Antipater. Antipater was married to Cypros, an Idumean woman. They had four sons and one daughter: Phaesel, Herod, Joseph, Pheroras and Salome. Antipater became very useful to Caesar when he made war with Egypt by persuading the Egyptian Jews to cultivate friendship with Caesar and to supply his army with money and provisions. After Caesar was victorious, Caesar honored Antipater and confirmed his friend, Hyrcanus in the high priesthood and bestowed upon Antipater the privilege of being a citizen of Rome and freedom from taxes. Caesar made Antipater procurator of Judea.

Antipater, seeing that Hyrcanus was a slow and mild man, made his son Phaeselus the governor of Jerusalem and his second son, Herod, in charge of Galilee when he was only fifteen years old.

In 63 B.C. Pompey took Jerusalem and the Hasmonean rule came to an end. Hyrcanus II was allowed to continue as High Priest, but Aristobulus was taken prisoner to Rome.
HEROD THE GREAT

Herod was a violent and bold man. He was responsible for the murders of many people:
Hezekias, captain of a band of robbers ----- unlawfully without a trial
All the members of the Sanhedrin who sought to bring him to trial
His sons, Alexander, Aristobulus and Antipater
Three of his wives, including his beloved Mariamne
Aristobulus, brother of Mariamne
Hyrcanus II, the High Priest and Mariamne's grandfather
Joseph

Herod was shrewd, conniving and vindictive.
He obtained the title of king by paying a large sum of money to Antony of Rome.