

# Judea Capta Coins

## What are they?

A series of coins minted by Roman Emperor Vespasian (69-79 CE) and his son Emperor Titus (79-81 CE) to celebrate the defeat of the Judean rebels in the Great Revolt of 66-74.

## Why are they important for Jewish history?

On a symbolic level, they represent a major turning point in Jewish history: the colossal, decisive defeat of the Judean rebels by the Roman leaders in a war that proved deeply troubling to the Roman military establishment and, remarkably given the huge disparity between the power and might of Rome and tiny Judea, to the Empire as a whole. We must recall how important coins were to ancient governments (and, in many ways, even to modern governments): they represent official self-portraits of the State and its major political achievements, circulating widely in a society that had limited access to other forms of communication, official or otherwise. The Judea Capta coins said, much like the Merneptah Stele, “the Jews are destroyed forever.”

## Why are they controversial?

Ironically, even though they have been absorbed in Jewish national consciousness as symbols of a humiliating defeat, their very existence belies the message the Romans wanted to convey. First of all, Judea was hardly “capta” (captured): it was already relegated to provincial status, firmly part of the Roman empire for over 120 years since General Pompey entered

Jerusalem in 63 BCE. Perhaps it would be correct to say Judea Recaptured, but that it in itself would be an embarrassment: tiny Judea was, for Rome, as Viet Nam was for the United States, or Chechnya for Russia: an irritating minor rebellion that even great generals like Cestius Gallus could not control, requiring Vespasian himself and his son Titus (both to become Emperors) to put down the rebellion. These misogynistic coins, like the grotesque Arch of Titus and the ceremonial execution of a token rebel in the grandiose Triumph in Rome, represent an attempt by Rome to cast this embarrassment as a victory, which would have appeared hollow to an Empire that stretched from the Atlantic to Persia.

## Fun Facts and Sources

1. In 1958 the State of Israel issued a commemorative coin titled Israel Liberata. On one side it presents a version of the infamous Judea Capta, surrounded by chains. On the obverse, a cleverly executed mirror image: in place of the looming Roman soldier, a woman plays with her infant child; in place of the destitute Judea, an Israeli kibbutznik plants a sapling.
2. <https://en.israelmint.com/default/25000619.html>  
<https://llewelynmorgan.com/2017/06/26/judaea-liberata/>

# Resources

1. Wikipedia article has a [pile of links](#) to samples and basic discussions of the coins.  
Like [this one](#).
2. Excellent chapter on the propaganda value of the coins, and the political motivations for promulgating Judea Capta in various forms: see [Steve Mason, \*A History of the Jewish War\*, 66-74](#) (unfortunately not available online).
3. [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1eBfiCegTxgLtoBFPpgTFChi\\_8R9QtiHz/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1eBfiCegTxgLtoBFPpgTFChi_8R9QtiHz/view?usp=sharing)
4. The Palm Trees Schwab referenced:  
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1I4eMjkV6xZn5d5R5kZ3-MS0zDQHyF2ao/view?usp=sharing>

