

## **Rome and Jerusalem**

### *Thought for the Day*

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No-one who's visited Rome can have missed the Arch of Titus, standing 50 feet high just outside the Forum. The carvings on this relic of ancient Rome show the furniture and vessels that the Romans looted from the Temple in Jerusalem in the year 70, so it's also a crucial document in Jewish history. This victory over a tiny nation at almost the eastern extreme of their empire mattered so much to the Romans that they built this huge monument in the centre of their capital, but, for the Jews, the loss of Jerusalem, and of their sovereignty, was utterly traumatic.

Today is the anniversary of these undisputedly historical events. On this day, one thousand, nine hundred, and forty seven years ago, Titus and the Roman army finally destroyed the Temple after a long siege, on the same date that Solomon's Temple had been conquered by the Babylonians more than 650 years earlier. They went on to destroy the city and exile its inhabitants, and even changed its name in an effort to erase it from history.

But destroying its memory proved more difficult than demolishing it physically, since Jerusalem is mentioned by various names around 800 times in the Hebrew Bible. But still, these disasters were life-changing for Judaism, which had lost its lynchpin. The trauma itself became a focus of remembrance, so that to this day – on this day – Jewish people mourn the loss of the Temples in Jerusalem with rituals barely distinguishable from personal mourning for a parent or relative.

But the Talmud also sees a ray of hope in this darkness, which illuminates a universal message of optimism, just as yesterday's moving ceremonies at Ypres didn't just honour the past, but reminded us how society has changed for the better – every obstacle is an opportunity, and every door that closes is an invitation to explore a new direction, so that even when we're at our lowest, we can still look forward with optimism and hope.