

Inspired by their example Josephus and the rest of the defenders again snatched up firebrands and set light to the engines, shelters, and constructions of the Fifth Legion and the routed Tenth. The other units were quick to cover their tackle and all their timber with earth. In the evening they again set up the ram and brought it against the place where the earlier battering had weakened the wall. At this juncture one of the defenders on the battlements hit Vespasian with an arrow in the sole of his foot. The wound was superficial, as the impact of the shaft was weakened by the long range, but the occurrence produced the utmost consternation in the Roman ranks; for the sight of the blood badly shook those nearest to Vespasian, and the news ran through the whole army, with the result that most of the men forgot the siege and in dismay and terror came running towards their commander. First to arrive was Titus, in fear for his father's life, so that the rank and file were agitated both by their regard for their leader and by the evident distress of his son. However it was quite easy for the father to put an end to his son's fears and the consternation of the army. Rising above his pain and showing himself instantly to all who were alarmed on his behalf, he stimulated them to yet more furious onslaughts; every man in his eagerness to avenge his commander was anxious to be in the forefront of danger, and shouting encouragement to each other they dashed towards the wall.

Josephus and his men, although falling in heaps under the barrage of spears and stones, clung stubbornly to the battlements and with fire, steel, and stones continued to pelt those who under cover of their hurdles were swinging the ram. But they accomplished little or nothing, and they themselves were continually falling, because the enemy could see them without being seen; for their own fires lit them up from every side, making them as conspicuous a target for the enemy as in daylight, and since the engines were too far off to be visible, it was difficult to avoid the missiles. The force of the spear-

throwers and catapults was such that a single projectile ran through a row of men, and the momentum of the stones hurled by 'the engine's' carried away battlements and knocked off corners of towers. There is in fact no body of men so strong that it cannot be laid low to the last rank by the impact of these huge stones. The effectiveness of 'the engine' can be gathered from incidents of that night: one of the men standing near Josephus on the rampart got into the line of fire and had his head knocked off by a stone, his skull being flung like a pebble from a sling more than six hundred yards; and when a pregnant woman was struck in the belly on leaving her house at daybreak, the unborn child was carried away a hundred yards; so tremendous was the power of that stone-thrower. Even more terrifying than the actual engines and their missiles was the rushing sound and the final crash. There was a constant thudding of dead bodies as they were thrown one after another from the rampart. Within the town rose the terrible shrieks of the women, echoed from without by the groans of dying men. The whole strip of ground that encircled the battlefield ran with blood, and it was possible to climb up the heap of corpses on to the battlements. The din was made more terrifying by the echoes from the mountains around, and on that night nothing was wanting that could horrify ear or eye. Hundreds of those engaged in Jotapata's death-struggle fell like heroes; hundreds were wounded. Not till the time of the morning watch did the wall yield to the continual blows of the artillery; and then the Jews filled the breach with their bodies and their weapons to block the way before the Romans could rush the scaling-gangways into position.

At daybreak Vespasian assembled his army for the final assault, refreshed by a short rest after the toils of the night. As he wished to draw off the defenders from the breaches, he dismounted the pick of his horsemen and ranged them in three groups against the gaps in the wall, completely encased in armour and with long spears in rest, in order that as soon as the gangways were in position they might force the first entry. Behind them he ranged the flower of his infantry. (The rest of the cavalry he extended opposite the wall across the whole slope to intercept any man who might escape when the town was captured.) Still further back he stationed the bowmen in a curving line, ordering them to have their arrows ready to discharge; the slingers and artillerymen received similar instructions. Other men were to carry ladders and set them up against the undamaged portions

of the wall, in the hope that some Jews in their efforts to hold them off would abandon the defence of the breaches, while the rest would be forced by the deluge of missiles to leave the way in unguarded.

Josephus, realizing what was afoot, stationed the older men and the battle-weary on the undamaged parts of the wall, where they were unlikely to suffer any hurt: where the wall had been broken through he posted the fittest of his men, each group headed by six officers, among whom he himself drew a place in order to be in the thick of the fight. He issued instructions that when the legions raised their battle-cry, the men were to stop their ears to avoid panic, and when the hail of arrows fell, they were to bend double under cover of their long shields and withdraw a little way, until the bowmen had emptied their quivers. But as the gangways fell into position they were to leap forward at once, hurling themselves at the enemy across his own apparatus. Every man must fight to the death, not for a birthplace that could still be saved, but for one that was already lost yet must be avenged. 'Picture to yourselves,' he concluded, 'old men butchered, women and children slaughtered by the foe at any moment now. These impending disasters arouse fury in your breasts. Seize that fury and hurl it against those who will cause the disasters.'

Such were the arrangements Josephus made for the two classes of defenders. But when the useless section of the community, the women and children, saw the triple line that encircled the town – none of the guards posted earlier had been moved into the battle – and saw too before the fallen ramparts the enemy, sword in hand, and the slope above them flashing with arms, and above them again the arrows of the Arab bowmen, they raised a last united shriek at their capture, as if ruin was no longer a threat but a present reality. Josephus, for fear that their lamentation might weaken the resolution of their menfolk, locked them in their homes, threatening them with punishment if they did not hold their tongues. Then he strode into the breach and took his stand where the lot had fallen to him. Of those who were bringing up the ladders elsewhere he took no notice, his thoughts intent on the coming rain of arrows.

At one and the same moment the trumpets of all the legions blared and a hair-raising battle-cry burst from ten thousand throats. This was the signal for a volley of arrows from every side that darkened the sky. Not forgetting Josephus' instructions the men under him stopped their ears against the shout and shielded their bodies from the volleys;

as the gangways were dropped into position, they charged over them before the men who were dropping them could set foot on them. Then pouncing upon the enemy as they struggled up, they gave a magnificent display of prowess and fighting spirit, striving in the midst of utter ruin to prove themselves the equals of those who with so much less at stake showed such remarkable courage. No one broke off his struggle with an opponent until one or the other was dead. But while the Jews were being steadily worn out by the non-stop battle and were unable to replace their front-line officers, on the Roman side exhausted units were relieved by fresh troops, and as soon as one group was forced back another came forward; they cheered each other on, and standing shoulder to shoulder under cover of their long shields they formed an unbreakable mass,<sup>4</sup> which with the whole formation pushing as one man forced the Jews up the slope and a minute later would have been on the wall.

The situation was critical, and Josephus taught by necessity – always quick to improvise when despair applies the spur – ordered boiling oil to be poured on the soldiers under the shields. As his men had it ready, numbers of them from every side poured quantities of it on the Romans, followed by the vessels still hissing from the flames.<sup>5</sup> Scalded and burnt, the Romans broke up their formation and in agonizing pain rolled down from the wall; for the oil instantly ran under their armour and over their entire bodies from head to foot, consuming their flesh as relentlessly as a fire, being by nature quick to grow hot and slow to cool because of its fattiness. Imprisoned in their cuirasses and helmets they could not escape from the scalding fluid. Leaping into the air and contorted with pain they fell from the wooden bridges one after another, while those who retired ran into their own men as they pressed forward, making themselves an easy target for the enemy shafts.

The Romans in their sorry plight displayed as much fortitude as ever, the Jews as much resource. The Romans, though they saw the pitiable sufferings of those who had been drenched with oil, continued their relentless advance against those who had drenched them, every-one abusing the man in front for blocking his way. The Jews, however, employed a second ruse, to trip them up as they advanced: they poured boiled fenugreek<sup>6</sup> on the boards of the gangways, so that the enemy slithered and lost their footing. Whether retiring or advancing nobody could stand upright; some fell on their backs while still on

the gangways and were trodden to death, many tumbled off on to the platform, where they were at the mercy of the Jews; for as the Romans could not stand, their opponents were no longer involved in hand-to-hand fighting and so could take careful aim. As they had been badly mauled in this assault, the commander towards evening called off his troops. Of the Romans many were dead and more were wounded; of the defenders of Jotapata only six had been killed, but over three hundred wounded were brought back from the battle. This fighting took place on the 20th of Daisios.

Vespasian tried to console his army for its misfortunes, but when he saw that the men were angry and needed not exhortation but work to do, he ordered them to raise the platforms higher and to erect three towers, each fifty feet high, encased in iron on all four sides, so that they would be too heavy to overturn and almost proof against fire. These he pushed forward on to the platforms, placing on top spearmen, bowmen, the light artillery, and also the most powerful of the slingers. These men, concealed by the height of the towers and the breastworks, proceeded to pelt the defenders exposed on the ramparts. The Jews found it almost impossible to dodge the missiles launched at their heads or to retaliate on their invisible assailants, and seeing that the tops of the towers were beyond the reach of weapons thrown by hand, while the iron that encased them was proof against fire, they abandoned the wall and sallied out to meet any attack that might be attempted. In this way Jotapata held out, though every day many lost their lives and the survivors could do no damage to the enemy in return, and could only block their advance at great risk.