

# The Judeans Prepare for War

by [Jeffrey Burghauer](#) (July 2023)



*The Destruction of Jerusalem by Roman Armies under command of Titus in AD 70, David Roberts, 1850*

*From a translation of *Siege of Jerusalem*, the anonymous 14<sup>th</sup> c. Middle English epic.\**

**Assembled were thousands** of Israelites, each  
Upon an impetuous horse,  
Both horsemen & horses prepared for the breech.

This number excluded the mobilized force  
Attending the City's quartet  
Of gates interrupting the battlements' course.

The twenty-five elephants (fortresses set  
Upon their Precambrian backs)  
Asserted that what wasn't, just wasn't...yet.

The elephant-fortresses glittered with plaques  
Of metal as solid as Sin  
When facing a terrible virtue's attacks.

Each bastion fastened to elephant skin  
Was soldiered compactly abreast:  
A hundred without, and a hundred within.

A hundred Arabian camels were dressed  
In chainmail. Each loftily bore  
A bullying tower, the Poets attest.

The towers on Bactrians hosted a score  
Of soldiers; their contours, encased  
In steel. How fantastic, these habits of war!

Designed when disinterested geniuses traced  
The nightmare commanding the glen  
Established in Slumber's malevolent waste.

And then there were chariots carrying men  
Not given to feeling afraid,  
Who, even before the Omnipotent Pen

Maintained by the Hand of the Heavens had stayed  
The motions of war, would be dead  
On sand that fresh blood had turned into a glade.

The heaviest elephant (covered in red  
And amethyst fabrics) emerged  
From numberless shadows exquisitely spread

Behind a Gibraltarform reverie purged  
From oceans exploding in dreams.  
The elephant's weight diabolically surged.

Attired in deathly-luxurious gleams,  
The castle it carried upon  
Its body aspired to Mammon's extremes:

A silver pavilion fine as a swan,  
A plan's most extravagant part,  
Pragmatic at midnight; by daybreak, forgone.

The silver pavilion had as its heart  
A chest of white silver, and then  
A chair of beguiling, torturous art.

What madman imagines such furniture? When  
The candlelight flickered nearby,  
The gold of the chair serenaded: "Amen."

Upholstered in cloth of imperial dye,  
And studded with tumors of gold,  
And heavy with sapphires smooth as an eye.

Upon it, the silent, majestically cold,  
Monarchical Caiaphas sat,  
Emotionless, focused, resplendently stole'd,

Invested with tunics, a ritual hat,  
A breastplate encrusted with gems,  
And trousers as soft as the ghost of a cat.

He absently whispered: "They'll fall before Shem's  
Descendants. Vespasian, the beast,  
Is ruined."—a confidence Prudence condemns.

A choir surrounded the decadent priest  
With psalmody. Caiaphas took  
A scroll from the chest, an ethereal feast—

A critical scroll whose profundities shook  
The world with miraculous tales  
Of Moses; of armies subdued by a book;

Of Jonah's descent to a furious whale's  
Interior dusk; of the HE  
Who renders the Chosen emergency trails

Permitting the shivering exiles free,  
Miraculous license to pass  
Directly athwart the devouring Sea.

Thus Caiaphas lorded his palace of glass  
Relaxed on Complacency's beach,  
Unshaken, expecting the Roman "ALAS!"

## [Table of Contents](#)

**Jeffrey Burghauser** is a teacher in Columbus, OH. He was educated at SUNY-Buffalo and the University of Leeds. He currently studies the five-string banjo with a focus on pre-WWII picking styles. A former artist-in-residence at the Arad Arts Project (Israel), his poems have appeared (or are forthcoming) in *Appalachian Journal*, *Fearsome Critters*, *Iceview*, *Lehrhaus*, and *New English Review*. Jeffrey's book-length collections are available on [Amazon](#), and his website is [www.jeffreyburghauser.com](http://www.jeffreyburghauser.com).

Follow NER on Twitter [@NERIconoclast](#)