

THE CHEIL AND THE SOREG

by Rabbi Yoav Elan



The Cheil and Soreg outside of the Women's Courtyard

Standing at a distance of 10 cubits (15 feet) from the outside of the Courtyard walls on all four sides was a low wall, half a cubit (9 inches) high. This wall, as well as the area between it and the Courtyard walls, was referred to as the *Cheil*. A wooden latticework fence, 10 handbreadths (30 inches) high, was built atop this wall and was called the *Soreg*.

The Temple was comprised of different areas of increasing sanctity — the higher the level of sanctity the more restricted the entry into that area. Whereas most people were permitted on the Temple Mount, entry beyond the *Cheil* and *Soreg* was only allowed to members of the Jewish faith who were free of corpse-*tumah* [ritual contamination contracted from touching, or being under the same roof as, a corpse]. During the period of Hellenistic persecution the Syrian-Greek kings contemptuously made thirteen breaches in this wall to protest their being barred from this section of the Temple. When control of the Temple was later regained by the Hasmoneans (the Jewish resistance) they repaired these breaches and the Sages decreed that anyone who passes by one of the repaired breaches must bow down to give thanks to God for destroying the Greek regime and abolishing their evil decrees.

Of the 10 cubits of space occupied by the *Cheil* the first 4 cubits (6 feet) were flat while the remaining 6 cubits (9 feet) held the steps leading up to the walls of the Courtyard. These steps, twelve in all, were each half a cubit (9 inches) high and half a cubit deep. As a rule, all steps in the Temple ran the entire width of the area they led up to and were not limited to the area directly in front of the gate. In the case of the *Cheil* this meant that its twelve steps ran completely around all four walls of the Courtyard. The area just outside the *Cheil* on the Temple Mount was left as an open plaza lined with benches where the people could gather.

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