


# GATES OF THE COURTYARD

by Rabbi Yoav Elan

The Main Courtyard was surrounded by walls 40 cubits (60 feet) tall and seven large gateways opened into the Courtyard from the outside. All of these gateways had the same dimensions as the Temple Mount gates - 10 cubits wide and 20 cubits tall (15 feet by 30 feet), and they all had double doors. When the Jews returned from exile to build the Second Temple they were poor and could not afford to spend lavishly on the structure. At some later point when their financial situation had improved they were able to plate all of the doors of the Temple gates with gold.

In the center of the eastern wall of the Courtyard stood the Nikanor Gate. This gate, which served as the main public entrance into the Courtyard, was named for the pious and wealthy individual who donated its two doors. He had these doors crafted of Corinthian bronze, a highly prized alloy of the ancient world, and because this metal shined like gold these doors remained in their original copper even when the other doors were plated with gold.

 The Nikanor Gate, as viewed from the Women's Courtyard

In the southern wall of the Courtyard were three large gates, distributed evenly along the length of the wall. The westernmost of these was the Kindling Gate through which they would bring firewood to fuel the fires of the Altar. In the center of the wall was the Firstborns Gate where firstborn animals would be brought into the Courtyard and given to the *Kohanim*. The third gate in the south was the Water Gate which took its name from the fact that on *Succos* the water libations (see Class #5) were brought into the Courtyard through this gate. This gate was selected for this purpose since it was located across from the Altar, allowing the libations to be poured onto the Altar without delay.

The northern wall also contained three large gates which were located across from those in the south. Nearest to the west was the Spark Gate, so named because the *Kohanim* maintained a fire there which was kept burning constantly. To the east of the Spark Gate was the Sacrifice Gate through which all animals used for sacrifices of the highest sanctity were brought into the Courtyard. [All sacrifices fall into one of two general categories: those of lesser sanctity and those of the highest sanctity. The latter category has certain stringencies associated with it, including the requirement that the animals be slaughtered in the northern half of the Courtyard. It is for this reason that the Sacrifice Gate was located in the northern wall.] The third gate in the north opened into a large

chamber called the Hall of the Fire which, in turn, opened to the Courtyard. This chamber served as the sleeping quarters for the *Kohanim* working in the Temple and contained a large warming fire for their benefit.

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