


# CHAMBERS OF THE COURTYARD

by Rabbi Yoav Elan

The Courtyard contained a large number of chambers which served a multitude of different purposes. Along the eastern wall on either side of the Nikanor Gate were two chambers. To the north was the Chamber of Pinchas the Clothier where the Priestly Vestments were stored and distributed. The chamber was named after the very first Temple clothier called Pinchas.

 Chamber of Hewn Stone

To the south of the Nikanor Gate was the Chamber of the Makers of the *Chavitin*. In this chamber the *Kohanim* would prepare the *chavitin* [named for the *machavas*, the type of pan in which it is fried], a meal-offering offered daily - and paid for - by the *Kohen Gadol*. Twelve loaves of *chavitin* were prepared each day, half of which were offered in the morning and half in the afternoon.

On the southern side of the Courtyard there were two elevated chambers located directly above the Water Gate. The first of these, the Chamber of Avtinas, was where the Avtinas family would carry out the compounding of the incense offered daily in the Temple. Adjacent to the Chamber of Avtinas on the east was a *mikveh* [ritual bath] where the *Kohen Gadol* would immerse on the morning of *Yom Kippur* as he began the sacrificial service.

In the southeast corner of the Courtyard were three chambers. The Chamber of Salt contained salt used to apply to the sacrifices. [All sacrifices were salted before being placed upon the Altar.] The Chamber of Parvah, located to the west of the Chamber of Salt, was where they would tan the hides of the sacrifices. On its roof was a *mikveh* used by the *Kohen Gadol* for the other immersions required as part of the sacrificial service of *Yom Kippur*. The Chamber of the Washers was to the west of the Chamber of Parvah and was used to wash out the stomachs of sacrificial animals.

In the northeast corner were also three chambers. The Chamber of Hewn Stone, so called for the special square stones used in its construction, was the largest of the three northern chambers and served as the seat of the 71-member *Sanhedrin* court. Adjacent to the Chamber of Hewn Stone was the Chamber of Wood used by the *Kohen Gadol* to store his priestly vestments and also served as his residence for the week before *Yom Kippur*. The Chamber of the Wheel contained a well which provided water for the Courtyard. This chamber was named for the wheel and rope system (i.e., a pulley) located there which was used to bring the water up from the well.

Built around the first of the large Courtyard gates on the north side was a chamber with a domed ceiling called the Hall of the Fire. Its main purpose was to serve as sleeping quarters for the watch of *Kohanim* currently on duty and it also provided them a place to warm themselves during the day, a necessary amenity since they had to walk around barefoot on cold marble floors as they performed the sacrificial service. [The *Kohanim* in the Temple could not wear any article of clothing in addition to their priestly vestments, which consisted of a robe, pants, belt, and a hat.] The large warming fire in the main hall of this chamber gave it its name. It also contained four smaller chambers in its four corners, each of which served a different purpose.

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