

Chapter 4

Separating Sacred and Mundane (The SoREG)

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לזכות עם ישראל בארץ הקודש, ובפרט כוחות הביטחון והחטופים
לזכות לוי יצחק בן שרה דינה ורבקה בת חנה וב”ב שיחיו, לאורך ימים ושנים טובות בבריאות והרחבה

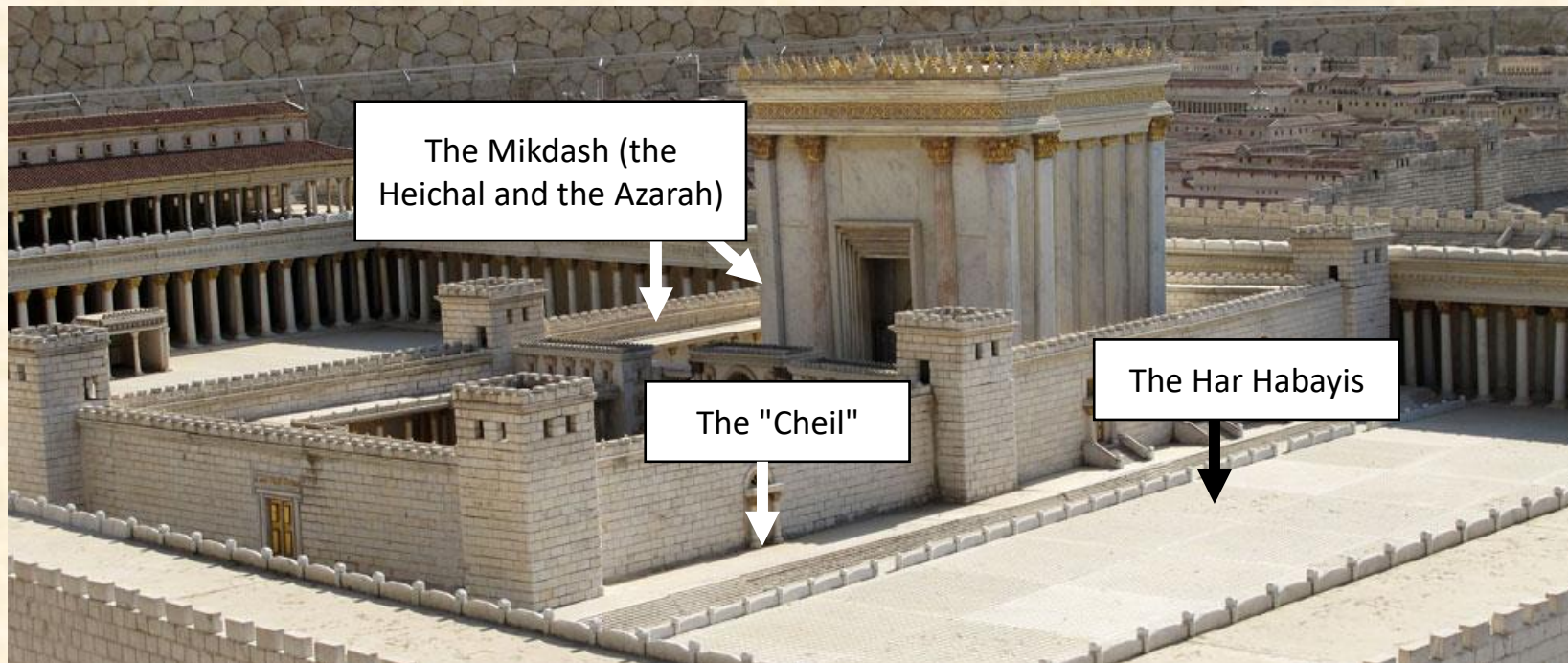
Welcome back visitors (and builders!) of the Beis Hamikdash. In the upcoming weeks, we'll navigate a structured tour inside the Beis Hamikdash and acquaint ourselves with the places and artifacts we'll encounter.

Our journey began on the outer perimeter of the Har Habayis. Having already explored the surroundings in previous sessions and marveled at the size of the gates and doors, we now proceed inward towards the Ezras Nashim (Women's Courtyard).

But wait! Just before the Ezras Nashim wall, we will notice a long, low fence (encircling the entire Ezras Nashim from the outside). What is this fence? Who built it and for what purpose? Well, behold the "**Soreg**": It serves as a kind of 'partition fence,' or perhaps more fittingly, a warning fence.

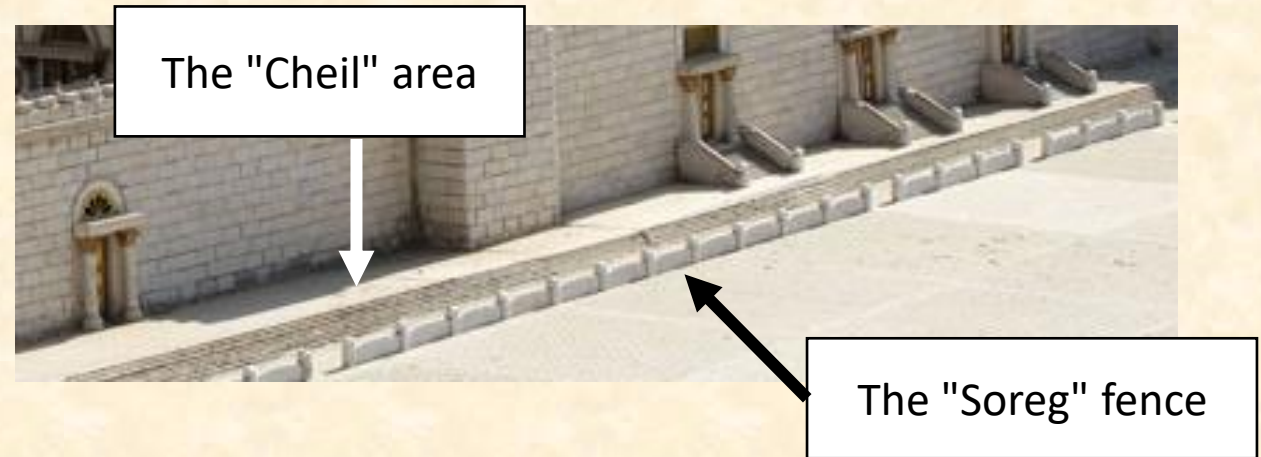
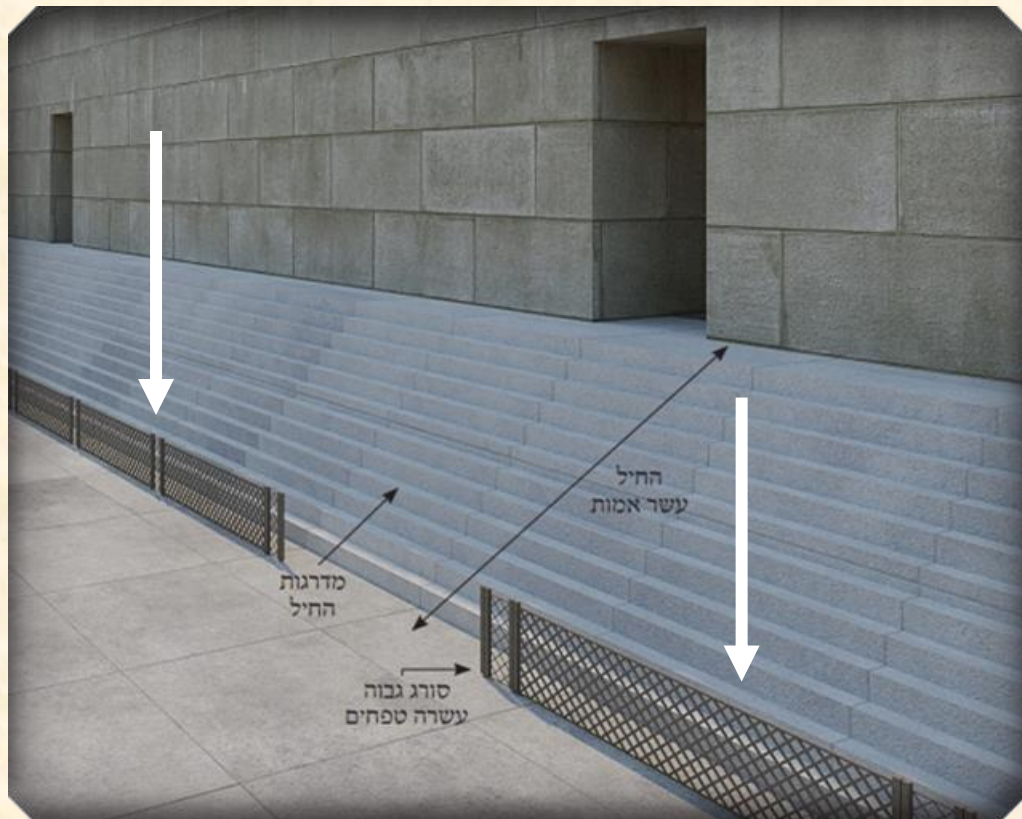
Let's briefly survey the Beis Hamikdash from a bird's eye view... Both the structure itself, the Hichal (sanctuary), and the Azarah (the courtyard adjacent to the Heichal).

The area adjacent to the Ezras Nashim wall from the outside was called the "Cheil." This area is holier than the rest of Har Habayis, because it touches the wall of the Beis Hamikdash. This area is off limits to those who are tamei (ritually impure). Gentiles visiting the Beis Hamikdash are also not allowed to enter beyond this point.



Note: Various opinions exist on the topics covered in this lesson. For the sake of simplicity, we present them as a unified view.

A physical boundary was therefore needed to remind these individuals that they are entering a place where they are forbidden to walk. For this reason, a fence was erected to draw attention to the restricted area upon entry. This fence is known as the "Soreg." Indeed, it's the first structure encountered as one enters near the Beis Hamikdash. The soreg was approximately 2.6ft high, though there is debate over whether it was made of wood or stone.

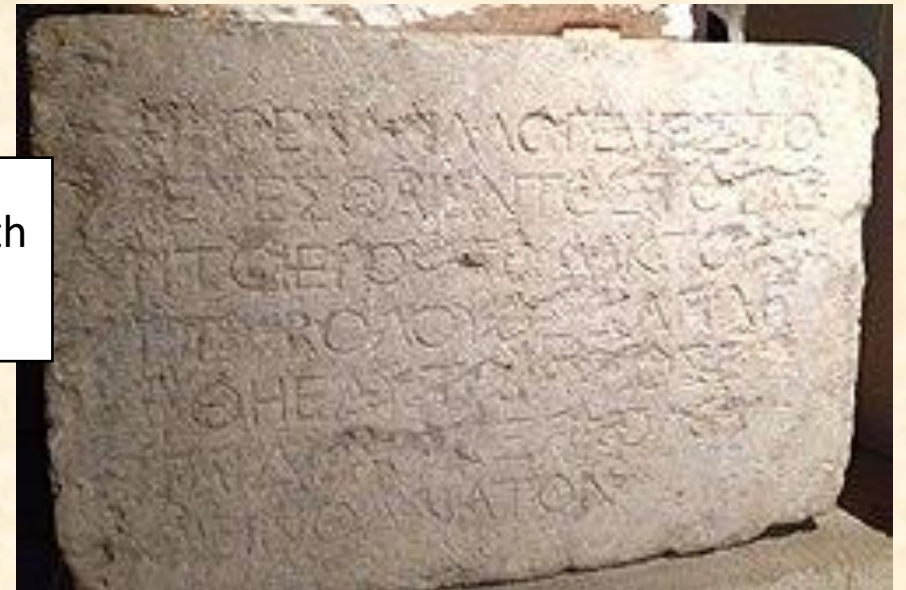


Courtesy of the "Hareinu BeVinyano" Institute

In front of the Soreg structure, stone tablets were placed with inscriptions in various languages warning non-Jews not to enter the sacred area. About 150 years ago, a complete stone with the full inscription in Greek was found! (The stone was moved during the Ottoman rule to a museum in Turkey. Part of another stone however, is in a museum in Jerusalem.) The inscription reads: **"No foreigner may enter within the barricade which surrounds the Temple and enclosure. Anyone apprehended will be held accountable for their ensuing death."**

Photograph of the stone with the warning

Wikipedia



Let's conclude with a fascinating event involving the Soreg.

The Soreg was central to the conflict between the Greeks and the people of Israel in the times of the Chanukah story. According to the Mishnah, the Greeks breached the Soreg in 13 places. After the Chashmonaim achieved victory, they repaired the breaches, and from then on, anyone passing through these spots would bow in gratitude to Hashem for the miracle He performed for them.

Why did the Greeks specifically target the Soreg?

Chasidus explains that the conflict between the Greek Empire and the Jews during the story of Chanukah was not just 'rational' but deeply 'spiritual.' The Greeks rejected the Jewish concept of 'holiness' versus 'profanity.' To them, the Torah was just another book of ancient wisdom. The Greeks had no sense of the Torah's inner sanctity.

The distinction between Jews and Gentiles when entering the Beis Hamikdash highlights an important point: Jews were chosen by Hashem to be a “nation of kohanim”; a “holy nation”. The Greeks could not accept this distinction. Therefore, they targeted the Soreg, the fence that emphasized the difference between the Bnei Yisrael (people of Israel) and other nations.

By repairing the fence, the Hasmoneans restored the recognition and awareness that indeed, Hashem is holy, the Torah is holy, and the Jews are holy.

So, what did we learn today?

- We learned about the "Cheil" area adjacent to the wall of the Ezras Nashim from the outside, which is forbidden to gentiles and those ritually impure.
- We became acquainted with the "Soreg" (low fence), surrounding the "Cheil" area and warning against entry.
- We also touched upon the spiritual significance of the "Soreg" fence.

In the next lesson: "A Tour Inside the Beis Hamikdash"