

ANIMADVERSIONES

The Defilement and Desecration of the Temple in Ezekiel*

The polarities of holy (קדש) and desecration (חול), and pure (טהור) and defilement (טמא), are overarching themes in Ezekiel⁽¹⁾. Desecration signifies the contrast to holiness, infringing upon the sacred domain and divesting it of its holy status. Hence, whenever we find the concept of holiness mentioned in Ezekiel, we find as well the converse notion – the desecration of holiness, the violation of this status. Alongside this contrast we also find the contrast between pure and defilement, as Ezekiel criticizes the people for defiling that which was to remain pure⁽²⁾.

Although Ezekiel generally adheres to the biblical distinction between defilement (טומאה) — as of the people and the land — and desecration (חילול) — as of the Sabbath and of God's name⁽³⁾ — he is unique in ascribing to the Temple both concepts of defilement (טומאה) and desecration (חילול)⁽⁴⁾. Previous studies on the connotations of the roots טמא (defile) and חלל (desecrate) treat them as interchangeable terms. This conclusion was reached mainly due to the problematic combination of these two expressions in the phrase טמא שם קדש “defile My holy name” (Ezek 43,7-8), a construction that appears only in Ezekiel.

The ascription of “defilement” to the “holy” name appears paradoxical, as the “holy” is desecrated, not “defiled”⁽⁵⁾. Thus, for example, Meir Paran concludes that “the roots חלל/טמא can be interchangeable, as one might deduce from a comparison between למען חלל את שם קדשי (so as to desecrate my holy

(*) The Anchor Bible edition was used for biblical citations, with the exception of Ezek 38-48, for which the NJPS edition was used.

(1) We address here only the “moral” purity and impurity which appears throughout Ezekiel. Ezekiel makes reference to the “ritual” statuses of purity and impurity in only one context (44,25-26), amidst the discussion of the laws pertaining to the priests.

(2) Desecration of the holy is generally accomplished, among other ways, by defiling it, though there can be something which is not holy but yet is pure. For more on the relationship between sacred/desecrated and pure/defiled, see J. MILGROM, “The Changing Concept of Holiness”, *Reading Leviticus* (ed. J.F.A. SAWYER) (JSOTSS 227; London 1996) 71-72; B. SCHWARTZ, *Torat Ha-kedusha* (Jerusalem 1999) 254.

(3) The people and the land are always described in Ezekiel as “impure” (לא טהור), whereas the Sabbath and God's name are always described as “desecrated” (חלל), with the single exception of Ezek 43,7-8, in which the divine name is “defiled” (טמא).

(4) D.F. O'KENNEDY, “חלל”, *Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis* (ed. W.A. VAN GEMEREN) (Grand Rapids, MI 1997) 145-150.

(5) See, for example, J. MILGROM, “The Changing Concept of Holiness”, 65-83. On p. 65, Milgrom assumes that God is holy, and on p. 72 he notes that the holy cannot come into contact with the impure. This difficulty led J. GAMMIE, *Holiness in Israel* (Minneapolis, MN 1989) 55-56, as well as others, to view these verses as a later addition by Ezekiel's followers.

name; Amos 2,7) and קדשי וממאז את שם (they would defile My holy name; Ezek 43,8)⁽⁶⁾.

Jacob Milgrom takes a different approach, suggesting that the connotations of these two terms are not precisely identical. In his view, “defilement” and “desecration” can be used interchangeably with respect to physical entities, such as the Temple, but not regarding non-physical entities such as time, to which only the status of הלל, desecration, can be ascribed. Thus, for example, the Sabbath is often spoken of as “desecrated”, but never as “defiled.” This explains the prevailing association between God’s name and the root הלל. As ממש always relates to physical objects, the Priestly writers avoided its application to God in order not to objectify the divine being⁽⁷⁾. In Ezekiel, however, according to Milgrom, these two concepts are used imprecisely, or, alternatively, Ezek 43,7-8’s singular use of ממש in reference to God’s name should be seen as an aberration.

Rimmon Kasher advances another, more compelling understanding of this difficult phrase, suggesting that since Ezekiel has a boldly anthropomorphic conception of God, he is objectified in Ezekiel’s prophecies. In such a conception, the divine dwelling place assumes supreme sanctity, and physical proximity to the divine dwelling place defiles God’s name, which effectively amounts to the defilement of God himself⁽⁸⁾.

The present discussion takes issue with the basic assumption that הלל and ממש are interchangeable, and argues that even in Ezekiel, they refer to two distinct notions. A careful examination of Ezekiel’s three references to the Temple’s “defilement” (5,11; 9,7; 23,38) as compared with the five instances where he speaks of its “desecration” (7,21-22; 23,39; 24,21; 25,3; 44,7) reveals a clear distinction between the two concepts, and demonstrates that Ezekiel indeed chose his words with precision.

I. “Defilement” (ממש)

We begin by examining Ezekiel’s descriptions of the Temple’s “defilement” and its underlying causes.

1. Ezek 5,11

In Ezek 5,11, the prophet attributes the defilement of the Temple to שיקוצים (“loathsome things”) and תועבות (“abominable things”): “Because you defiled my sanctuary with all your loathsome (שיקוציך)⁽⁹⁾ and abominable things (תועבותיך)⁽¹⁰⁾...”.

⁽⁶⁾ M. PARAN, *Forms of the Priestly Style in the Pentateuch*. Patterns, Linguistic Usages, Syntactic Structures (Jerusalem 1989) 110, n. 55 (Heb.).

⁽⁷⁾ J. MILGROM, *Leviticus 17–22* (AB; New York 2000) 1735. Milgrom includes both P and H in the Priestly Source.

⁽⁸⁾ R. KASHER, “Anthropomorphism, Holiness and Cult: A New Look at Ezekiel 40–48”, *ZAW* 110 (1998) 192-208.

⁽⁹⁾ The phrase שיקוציך is missing from the LXX.

⁽¹⁰⁾ The wording of this verse makes it difficult to determine if the involvement of the Israelites in idolatry itself defiles the Temple, or whether Ezekiel refers specifically to idolatrous practices performed within the Temple precincts, similar to that described at

The precise meaning of the term שִׁקּוּצִים has been discussed by several scholars, including Milgrom⁽¹¹⁾, who concluded that in P (Lev 11,10-42; 7,21) this term has a ritual meaning — forbidden foods; in H (Lev 11,44; 20,25) it has a metaphorical meaning of abhorrence and revulsion; and in Deut 7,26 and 29,16 it means idolatry (which is also, in his view, the meaning preserved in the Second Temple period)⁽¹²⁾. Ezekiel, on eight occasions, employs this term in clear reference to idolatry (5,11; 7,20; 11,18.21; 20,7.8.30; 37,23), thus indicating that in Ezekiel, as in Deuteronomy, שִׁקּוּצִים serves to denote idolatry⁽¹³⁾. Although in the Priestly Sources שִׁקּוּץ does not have the capacity to “defile”, once it became a pejorative name for idolatry, which indeed causes “defilement,” this term can then be associated with defilement.

“Abominations” constitute a second Temple-defiling factor for Ezekiel. The term תועבה appears 117 times in the Bible, and 45 of these occurrences are found in Ezekiel⁽¹⁴⁾. It is not surprising that Ezekiel, who, in conveying his message to the people, uses direct, crude means of expression in an attempt to alarm his audience, employs this term more frequently than any other prophet, as well as the unique constructions תועבות רעות (evil abominations; 6,11; 8, 9), תועבות גדולות (great abominations; 8, 13.15), and תועבות רעות (the images of their abominable things; 7,2). In particular, the construction צלמי תועבותם (images of their abominable things) is used nowhere else in the Bible⁽¹⁵⁾. These distinctive phrases, which impress upon Ezekiel’s audience the radical nature of the acts they committed, appear mainly in the context of the

length in chapter 8. These possibilities are grounded in the question of how impurity is passed on to the Temple in general, and in Ezekiel in particular.

⁽¹¹⁾ J. MILGROM, “Two Priestly Terms *šeqes* and *tāmē*”, *Tarbiz* 60 (1991) 423–428 (Heb.); D.N. FREEDMAN – A.J. WELCH, “שִׁקּוּץ”, *TDOT* XV, 465–469.

⁽¹²⁾ MILGROM, “Priestly Terms”, 424, distinguishes between the terms שִׁקּוּץ, שִׁרְיָן, and טָמֵא. The uniqueness of שִׁקּוּץ is that although it is forbidden for consumption, it does not defile by contact. It itself is pure, and, furthermore, since it originates in the ocean waters are not susceptible to impurity, it does not transmit impurity. There is no punishment for the consumption of a שִׁקּוּץ, whether intentional or accidental. Milgrom’s definition is consistent with the many instances of the root שִׁקּוּץ in the Priestly literature, but Lev 20,25 indicates that שִׁקּוּצִים do, in fact, transmit impurity: “You shall not defile your throats (תִּשְׁקֹצוּ אֶת נַפְשׁוֹתֵיכֶם) (וְלֹא יִלָּא) with a quadruped or bird or anything with which the ground teems, which I have set apart for you to treat as impure (לְטָמֵא).” Ezekiel also treats the שִׁקּוּץ as a conveyor of defilement: “They shall no more be polluted by their idols and by their loathsome things (וְלֹא יִטְמָאוּ עוֹד בַּגְּלוּלֵיהֶם וּבְשִׁקּוּצֵיהֶם) and by all their transgressions” (37,23).

⁽¹³⁾ Idolatry can be understood broadly as by J. MILGROM, “The Nature and Extent of Idolatry in Seventh-Eighth Century Judah”, *HUCA* 69 (1998) 1–13. Milgrom counts eighty-two instances in which Ezekiel protests against idolatry among the Israelites (p. 1). The present discussion treats only those verses that reveal the nature of these practices, as opposed to general censure of idolatry.

⁽¹⁴⁾ I will not address the etymology of this term, which is a matter of scholarly debate. For a recent consideration, see B.J. SCHWARTZ, *The Holiness Legislation* (Jerusalem 1999) 219 (Heb.) and the notes there; H. -D. PREUSS, “בההוה”, *TDOT* XV, 591–602 and bibliography, 591.

⁽¹⁵⁾ The word צלם appears twice more in Ezekiel, in both cases as part of a construction associated with harlotry: צלמי זכר (phallic images; 16,17) and צלמי כשדים (figures of Chaldeans; 23,14). In two other instances, Ezek 8,3 and 5, we find the term סמל which appears a total of five times in Scripture (Deut 4,16; 2 Chr 33,7.15), in both cases as part of the construction סמל הקנאה. There seems to be no clear-cut distinction between the two terms; indeed, the LXX uses the same word — στήλη [τοῦ κτωμένου] — for both.

idolatrours practices performed in the Temple, portrayed by Ezekiel as the pinnacle of “abomination”.

Many studies have been devoted to establishing the precise meaning of “abomination” in the Bible⁽¹⁶⁾. I submit that abomination, as employed by Ezekiel, serves as a broad, inclusive term used in reference to something repugnant and despicable in either the religious-cultic or social-moral sphere, and that any attempt to define this term simply distorts its meaning. The sins and immoral acts described as abominations in Ezekiel cannot be enumerated or defined with any degree of specificity, and thus this term must include a wide variety of sins⁽¹⁷⁾. It not only encompasses the sins enumerated in all the Pentateuchal codes, but it also extends to the intolerable acts perpetrated by the people that eventually brought about the Temple’s destruction and the nation’s exile. Ezekiel 22 alone lists twelve sins under the rubric of “abominations”: והודעתה את כל תועבותיה (then declare to her all her abominations!)⁽¹⁸⁾. Leviticus 24–30 instructs that abominations pollute the land and cause the people to be exiled, and to this Ezekiel adds that they defile the Temple.

2. Ezek 9,7

In chapter 9, Ezekiel points to a third factor that causes the Temple’s “defilement” (in addition to שיקועים and תועבות), namely, murderous acts committed in the Temple courtyard: “And YHWH said to him...’slay and destroy old men, youths and maidens, little ones and women...and start from my sanctuary!’ So they started with the elders who were before the house. He said to them, ‘Defile (מגוא) the house and fill its courts with corpses; go forth!’ So they went forth and killed in the city” (Ezek 9,4-7)⁽¹⁹⁾.

This passage describes the execution of people in the Temple courtyard,

⁽¹⁶⁾ See E. GERSTENBERGER, s.v. “to abhor”, *TLOT* III, 1428-1431; J. MILGROM, “Toeva”, *Encyclopedia Biblica*, VIII, 466-468 (Heb.); W.W. HALLO, “Biblical Abominations and Sumerian Taboos”, *JQR* 76 (1985) 21-40; J. KLEIN – Y. SEFATI, “The Concept of ‘Abomination’ in Mesopotamian Literature and the Bible”, *Beer-Sheva* 3 (1988) 131-148 (esp. n. 60) (Heb.); and W.H. PICKETT, *The Meaning and Function of ‘T’B/TO’EVAH’ in the Hebrew Bible*, Ph.D. diss., Hebrew Union College, 1985, where Pickett summarizes the state of research until 1985 (esp. 1-49, 286-300). Two studies are devoted to consideration of this term: P. HUMBERT, “Le substantif *to’ēbā* et le verbe *t’b* dans l’Ancien Testament”, *ZAW* 72 (1960) 227-231; and Pickett’s above-cited doctoral dissertation, 233-270.

⁽¹⁷⁾ In the other biblical books, it is possible to distinguish between the different contexts in which this term appears. Paran, *Priestly Style*, 346–347, differentiates between the Priestly Code (which he claims includes all the Priestly literature) and Deuteronomy, noting תועב’s limited framework in the Priestly Code as opposed to its more varied contexts in Deuteronomy. For a recent comparison of the use of תועב in Deuteronomy and the Holiness Code, see E. REGEV, “Moshe Weinfeld Reconsidered: Towards the Typology of Holiness in the Priestly Schools and Deuteronomy”, *Shnaton. An Annual for Biblical and Ancient Near Eastern Studies* 14 (2004) 51-74, esp. 62-63 (Heb.); and E. REGEV, “Priestly Dynamic Holiness and Deuteronomical Static Holiness”, *VT* 51 (2001) 243-261, esp. 248-250.

⁽¹⁸⁾ See PICKETT, ‘T’B/TO’EVAH, 237, and his conclusions, 279-301.

⁽¹⁹⁾ Ezek 9,6-7 makes consistent use of the root חלל: וממקדשי חללו; ויהיו, ויהללו, ויהללו. Even if the damage caused to the Temple can be described as desecration, nonetheless, Ezekiel deliberately chose to use the combination חלל את פניו (defiled the house).

as commanded by God himself. Whereas all other Temple-defiling acts involve sins committed against the divine will, here defilement results from a divine command to commit murder in the Temple courtyard. The obvious question arises as to why and how God could require an act that defiles the Temple, whose sanctity he so strictly demands be maintained.

One possible answer is that the Temple has already been defiled by the people's acts, and the divine presence has thus already left⁽²⁰⁾. Alternatively, this execution might serve as a symbolic act, aimed at heralding the Temple's impending destruction. Indeed, chapter 8 begins by relating that these events occurred "in the sixth year, in the sixth month, on the fifth of the month", and they therefore preceded the actual destruction, which occurred several years later, as chronicled in chapter 33: "It was in the twelfth year, in the tenth month, on the fifth of the month, of our exile, that a survivor from Jerusalem came to me, saying, 'The city has fallen'" (v. 21)⁽²¹⁾. This act should thus be seen merely as symbolic foreshadowing. Either way, God's active defilement of the Temple demonstrates that it is no longer immune, as the divine presence has left it. Indeed, these chapters of Ezekiel describe the departure of the divine presence from the Temple.

In any event, it emerges clearly from these verses that murderous acts in the Temple's courtyard cause its defilement.

3. Ezek 23,38–39

In these verses, the Temple's defilement occurs as a result of the sacrificial offering of children⁽²²⁾: "This, too (עֹד זָרָה)⁽²³⁾, they did to me: they defiled (שִׁבְּחוּ) my sanctuary on that day and they desecrated (חָלְלוּ) my Sabbaths; namely, when they slaughtered their children to their idols they entered my sanctuary on that day⁽²⁴⁾ to desecrate it (לְחַלְלוֹ). See, that is what they did inside my house!"⁽²⁵⁾ This type of Temple-defiling sin appears

⁽²⁰⁾ See GREENBERG, *Ezekiel 1–20* (AB; New York 1983) 177, where he compares this act to 2 Kgs 11,15 where, in order to preserve the purity of the Temple, Athaliah is removed from the sacred precinct prior to her execution.

⁽²¹⁾ The underlying conception here is that the prophecies found in Ezekiel 1–24 were delivered following the divine decision to destroy the Temple; consequently, they constitute an announcement, and not a warning.

⁽²²⁾ This differs from passing children through fire to fetishes, which, according to Ezek 20,31, defiles the nation at large, and not merely the Temple.

⁽²³⁾ The construction עֹד זָרָה appears in the Bible four times, three times in Ezekiel (20,27; 23,38; 36,37) and once in 2 Sam (7,19). In all these cases, the phrase denotes an addition to the foregoing.

⁽²⁴⁾ It should be noted that the phrase בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא is missing from the LXX in vv. 38 and 39, whereas all other instances of this phrase in Ezekiel appear there, as well. This can be explained by the redactor's desire (MT) to emphasize that the idolatry and defilement of the Temple took place on that very day. This phrase, which appears fifteen times in Ezekiel, generally denotes that the events in question took place during a certain period, and more rarely, on that very day.

⁽²⁵⁾ Ezek 23,37–39 addresses the manner in which the Temple becomes defiled. In v. 38, this status results from one's arrival in the Temple after the sacrificial offering of his children, desecration of the Sabbath, or other unspecified acts that defile the sanctuary. The expression בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא appears in v. 39, as well, but as opposed to the previous verse, here the temporal component is explicit: וּבְשַׁחֲשֵׁם אֶת בְּנֵיהֶם לְגִילּוּלֵיהֶם. Quite possibly, then, in this verse idol worship and the arrival in the Temple take place on the same day, and

already in the Priestly Sources (Lev 18,21-30 and 20,33), which form the basis for Ezekiel's viewing this act as a cause of defilement⁽²⁶⁾. Here in Ezekiel, the prophet combines the defilement of the Temple with its desecration, thereby emphasizing the severity of the people's wrongdoing and thus justifying the impending destruction of the Temple.

Thus, Ezekiel perceives the defilement of the Temple as the result of loathsome (שִׁקוּצִים) and abominable things (תועבות), murderous acts in the Temple courtyards, and the sacrifice of children to idolatry both within and outside the Temple.

II. "Desecration" (חילול)

Ezekiel makes reference to the "desecration" of the Temple in five contexts: chapters 7, 23, 24, 25, and 44⁽²⁷⁾. On one level, Ezekiel's description of this phenomenon closely resembles that of the Temple's defilement, in that it results from various forms of idolatry ("images of their abominable, loathsome things" — 7,20) and the sacrificial offering of children (23,39). However, in the context of the Temple's desecration, as opposed to its defilement, Ezekiel emphasizes that this is effectuated through the arrival of foreigners in the Temple. Even if the cause of the desecration is the people's sins, the means by which this occurs is the presence of foreigners. Thus, for example, Ezekiel 7,20-22 states, "Their beautiful adornment in which they took pride — out of it they made images of their abominable, loathsome things; therefore I will turn it into an unclean thing for them⁽²⁸⁾. I will hand it over to strangers as booty, to the wicked of the earth as spoil, and they shall desecrate it (וַחֲלִילוּהָ). I will avert my face from them and they shall desecrate (וַחֲלִילוּ) my treasure; violent men shall enter it and desecrate it"⁽²⁹⁾. However, as opposed to the verses describing the Temple's defilement, which depict the Israelites' misconduct as both the cause and the means to this end, Ezekiel here attributes the desecration of the Temple to the presence of aliens. The

it is this proximity between the idolatry and entry into the Temple that causes the desecration.

⁽²⁶⁾ MILGROM, *Leviticus 17–22*, 1384-1385 notes that the prevailing view in the eighth century BCE was that only Molech worship defiled the Temple, whereas in the seventh century, Jeremiah and Ezekiel prophesied that idolatry in all its forms defiles the sinners, the Temple, and the land.

⁽²⁷⁾ It should be noted that some of these verses combine the desecration of the Temple with that of Jerusalem.

⁽²⁸⁾ The term נִדָּה (unclean thing) generally refers to a menstruating woman. Here and in Ezek 36,17 it serves as a description of the people's moral sins. The only other instance of this usage of the word is in Ezra 9,11. See C.E. FONROBERT, *Menstrual Purity* (Stanford 2000) 18, n. 12.

⁽²⁹⁾ It is also possible that Ezek 7,24-25 makes specific reference to the sins that caused the people's desecration: "Forge the chain! For the land is full of bloody judgments and the city is full of lawlessness. So I will bring the worst of the nations and they shall take possession of their houses; And I will put an end to the pride of the fierce, and their sanctuaries shall be desecrated (וַחֲלִילוּ מִקְדְּשֵׁיהֶם)." The punctuation of the word מִקְדְּשֵׁיהֶם evidently refers to the people, and it means that those in charge of preserving the sanctity of Temple — the people — have been desecrated, even though contextually the subject of the sentence is the Temple. See GREENBERG, *Ezekiel 1–20*, 155.

consequence of the people's sins detailed in v. 20 is the Temple's falling into the hands of foreigners, which directly causes its desecration⁽³⁰⁾.

In chapter 44, Ezekiel again imputes the desecration of the Temple to the presence of foreigners: "admitting aliens, uncircumcised of spirit and uncircumcised of flesh, to be in my sanctuary and profane (לְהַלְלֵי) my very Temple" (v. 7). Here, however, unlike in chapter 7, the foreigners are brought by the Israelites themselves, rather than being sent by God. This invitation to foreigners to come to the Temple prompted God's command, "Let no alien, uncircumcised in spirit and flesh, enter my sanctuary — no alien among the people of Israel" (v. 9). In this prophecy, it is the people of Israel — not God — who brought the aliens to the Temple, thereby desecrating it, and God instructs that this be avoided in the future Temple.

The prophecy regarding the impending desecration of the Temple in Ezek 24,21 does not specify the sins from which this results or how the Temple will be desecrated⁽³¹⁾. Similarly, in Ezek 25,3 the prophet notes the joyous reaction of the Ammonites to the Temple's desecration, without identifying its cause⁽³²⁾.

Apart from the desecration of the Temple by foreigners, Ezekiel 23 cites yet another grievous act that desecrated the Temple: "Namely, when they slaughtered their children to their idols they entered my sanctuary on that day to desecrate it (לְהַלְלֵי). See, that is what they did inside my house!" (v. 39). The slaughtering of children to fetishes in the Temple precincts — God's house — leads to its immediate desecration⁽³³⁾. The desecration results not only from the introduction of foreigners, but also from the arrival of the Israelites themselves for the purpose of slaughtering children to fetishes.

This brief consideration shows that Ezekiel distinguishes between the

⁽³⁰⁾ The subject of וְהָלַל אֶת צַפְנֵי in this verse is ambiguous: the first part of the verse, וְהָלַל אֶת צַפְנֵי אֶת פְּנֵי מִדְּבָר, can be understood as referring to the people of Israel, from whom God turns his face after their sins desecrated the Temple, and that the aliens are the subject only of the verse's second clause (וּבָאֵי בָּהּ פְּרִיזִים וְהָלַלְוּהָ). In any event, the actual desecration of the Temple is effected by the foreigners who, by divine will, come to the Temple and desecrate it by their very presence.

⁽³¹⁾ See Rabbi David Kimhi's commentary to 24,21, in *Mikraot Gedolot Haketer* (ed. M. COHEN) (Jerusalem 2000) (translation cited from AB 22, 153): "Hence it will become unclean, desecrated by invaders." Perhaps the foreigners desecrate the Temple by their very arrival, without any further action on their part.

⁽³²⁾ It is possible that the desecration results simply from the fact that the foreigners enter the Temple, and not merely from the destruction they perpetrate there.

⁽³³⁾ The sins that caused the Temple's defilement and desecration are most clearly delineated in chapter 8, which addresses the various types of idolatry witnessed by Ezekiel in the Temple courts. It clearly emerges from the text that this idolatry, carried out in the sacred precinct, has an adverse effect on its sanctity. This explains the emphasis on the site of this worship (the great abominations that the house of Israel are committing her; תוֹעֵבוֹת גְּדֹלוֹת אֲשֶׁר בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל עֹשִׂים פֹּה), the result of which is "removing themselves from my sanctuary" (לְרַחֵק מֵעַל מִקְדָּשִׁי). No mention is made in this chapter of the defilement or desecration of the Temple (its defilement takes place through God's agents in chapter 9), but we may infer that these acts indirectly cause the defilement of the Temple from the consequent departure of the divine presence: "Now the Majesty of the God of Israel had moved off the cherub, on which it had been, to the threshold of the house" (9,3). The departure of the divine presence from the Temple is what allows God to command the six people, including the man clothed in linen, to pass through Jerusalem killing everyone they chance upon, thereby defiling the Temple through corpse impurity (Ezek 9, 3-7).

factors that defile the Temple, and those that desecrate it. Both phenomena relate to the Israelites' involvement in various types of idol worship, but whereas the Temple's defilement results directly from the people's involvement with idol worship, its desecration is generally caused by the entry of aliens into its precincts, sometimes as divine envoys, and sometimes with the approval of the people, who did not have the sense to exclude them. On other occasions, it is the arrival of Israelite worshipers in the Temple after slaughtering their children that effectuates the Temple's desecration.

III. "Defilement" in the Priestly Sources

An evaluation of the usage of the term "defilement" and "desecration" in the Priestly Sources further demonstrates that these terms are not randomly interchangeable, and also sheds light on Ezekiel's understanding of these terms in the Pentateuch as he enlisted them to convey his message to the people.

The six Pentateuchal references to the defilement or desecration of a sacred precinct are all found in the Priestly Sources (Lev 15,31; 20,3; 21,12; 21,23; 22,9; and Num 19,13). There, bodily discharges such as genital fluxes, seminal emissions, and menstrual blood (Lev 15) are deemed causes of "defilement" which have the capacity to defile the sanctuary: "You shall set apart the Israelites from their impurity (מטמאתם), lest they die through their impurity by polluting (בטמאתם) my Tabernacle which is among them" (v. 31)⁽³⁴⁾. Fluid bodily discharges cause impurity that defiles the sanctuary, thus rendering the impure person deserving of death.

A second cause of defilement is idolatry, specifically the worship of Molech. Leviticus 20 begins with the laws concerning a person who gives his offspring to Molech, whom God threatens to "cut off" from the people "because he dedicated his offspring, thus defiling my sanctuary (למען טמא את מקדשי) and desecrating my holy name (ולחלל את שם קדשי)" (v. 3). Giving offspring to Molech thus defiles the sacred precinct and desecrates the holy name. A person who commits this act is punished by God — by being cut off from the people — and by humans through stoning.

The third defiling agent in the Priestly Sources is corpse impurity. Numbers 19 describes the preparation of the ash of the red heifer and how it is used for purification from corpse impurity. In this context, impurity caused by exposure to a corpse is explicitly mentioned as a means of defiling the Temple:

"One who had contact with a corpse belonging to any human being who had died, but failed to purify himself, has defiled the Tabernacle of YHWH. That person shall be cut off from Israel, because water of lustration was not dashed on him. He remains impure; his impurity endures within him." (v. 13)

⁽³⁴⁾ This verse is perhaps the concluding verse of all of the pericopes concerning impurity (11,27–15,30) and does not necessarily relate to the impurities described in chapter 15, as assumed here. See M. BOLLE, *Va-Yiqra* (Da'at Miqra; Jerusalem 1992) 284.

“But any person who becomes impure, but fails to purify himself — that person shall be cut off from the midst of the congregation, for it is the Sanctuary of YHWH that he has defiled. Water of lustration was not dashed on him: he remains impure.” (v. 20)⁽³⁵⁾.

Accordingly, the Priestly Sources attribute the defilement of the sanctuary to the three factors of idolatry, bodily emissions and corpse impurity.

Ezekiel clearly enlists the concept of Temple defilement in the same manner in which it is used in the Priestly Sources. Ezek 9,7 — as we saw — speaks of the presence of corpses as defiling the Temple, and 5,11 mentions the defilement caused by idolatry. Ezek 23,39 draws an indirect association between the particular phenomenon of child sacrifices and the Temple’s defilement, a link more clearly established in Lev 20,3. And although Ezekiel makes no explicit reference to the impurity caused by bodily discharges, Ezek 23,38 could be understood as a general injunction against introducing any type of ritual impurity into the Temple⁽³⁶⁾.

IV. “Desecration” in the Priestly Sources

If regarding the concept of “defilement” Ezekiel closely adheres to the model established in the Priestly Sources, in his usage of the term “desecration” he charts his own path. In Leviticus, desecration results from the disruption of the priestly functions. For example, Leviticus 21 lists the restrictions imposed on the high priest due to his high office, and requires that he remain in the sanctuary even after the death of a family member: “He shall not leave the sacred area so that he not desecrate (ולא יחלל) the sacred area of his God, for the distinction of the anointing oil of his God is upon him. I (who speak) am YHWH” (v. 12). A high priest who leaves the shrine because of the death of a close relative has caused the desecration of the holy precinct⁽³⁷⁾.

The end of Leviticus 21 addresses the status of a priest with a physical deformity, and mandates that such a priest “shall not enter before the veil or officiate at the altar, for he has a blemish. And he may not desecrate (ולא יחלל) my sanctums. (Thereby) I am YHWH who sanctifies them” (v. 23). Thus, a priest (presumably referring specifically to a high priest⁽³⁸⁾) with a deformity

⁽³⁵⁾ For the purposes of this discussion, it is not necessary to establish whether the presence of any impure person in the camp causes, in one way or another, the defilement of the temenos, or if it can be defiled only through the entry of a person contaminated by corpse impurity.

⁽³⁶⁾ עוד זאת עשו לי, טמאו את מקדשי... (This too they did to me: they defiled my sanctuary...).

⁽³⁷⁾ The syntax of this verse might suggest that the high priest desecrates the sanctuary simply by leaving the holy precinct. See MILGROM, *Leviticus 17–22*, 1815-1818.

⁽³⁸⁾ Rabbi Abraham Ibn Ezra (in the *Torat Hayim* edition of the Bible, Jerusalem, 1990; Lev 21, 23) comments that the prohibition in Lev 21,23 (אל הפרכת לא יבא) relates to the high priest and apparently refers to his entering the area behind the curtain on the Day of Atonement. See also MILGROM, *Leviticus 17–22*, 1830-1831, where he interprets the verse as directed entirely to the high priest.

who enters the “sanctified area”⁽³⁹⁾ or goes to offer a sacrifice on the outer altar⁽⁴⁰⁾ desecrates the temenos.

Leviticus 22 deals with the injunction forbidding the priests to eat the sacred donations of the Israelites when they or the foods are ritually impure. Verse 9 concludes this discussion by admonishing, “They shall heed my prohibition lest they bear sin by it and die thereby when they desecrate it (כי יחללהו); I am YHWH who sanctifies them.” It is difficult to determine whether the phrases “by it” and “when they desecrate it” refer to the sacred donations or to the sanctuary. While from the context it might appear that the verse speaks here of the holy things, it is possible that it is the sanctuary that is desecrated through the consumption of sacred donations in a forbidden state⁽⁴¹⁾.

In Leviticus, then, the causes of desecration all relate to the disruption or suspension of the priests’ ritual functions in the Temple. This concept of “desecration” differs significantly from Ezekiel’s usage of this term in reference to the withdrawal of the Temple’s sanctity in the wake of the sinful acts committed in its precincts, usually in the presence and through the means of foreigners.

V. Ezekiel’s Exegesis

For Ezekiel, defilement of the Temple is defined primarily in terms of two of the causes mentioned in the Priestly Sources, namely, corpse impurity and idolatry⁽⁴²⁾. The concept of defilement is grounded in very specific actions, as delineated in the Priestly Sources, and this status cannot surface through any other means. Ezekiel’s strict adherence to the Priestly Sources’ definitions of defilement may perhaps be attributed to his being a member of the priestly caste in exile, which led him to insist upon the preservation of the Pentateuchal classifications.

⁽³⁹⁾ MILGROM (ibid.) emphasizes the difference between the phrasing אל הפרכה לא יבא, which he understands as referring to the sanctified area of the tabernacle, and מבית הפרכה, which refers to the Holy of Holies. In his view, it is to this latter area that a high priest with a deformity is forbidden entry to perform routine activities such as the rites of the menorah and the table. Any priest with a blemish can enter the sacred area for non-cultic purposes, such as covering the sanctums in preparation for journey, or for their cleansing, and so on. The permission granted to priests with deformities to consume consecrated food indicates that they are not barred from contact with sacred things, but only from active participation in the Temple cult.

⁽⁴⁰⁾ Joseph Bekhor Shor comments that this refers to the golden altar, but most commentators understand it as referring to the outer altar. See MILGROM, *Leviticus 17–22*, 1830–1831.

⁽⁴¹⁾ See, for example, Ibn Ezra, *ad loc.* According to this understanding, carelessness with regard to the consumption of sancta in purity by the priests leads to sin, desecration of the Temple, and death. If so, then this signifies the only instance in Scripture where the concepts of defilement and desecration converge with respect to the sanctuary: consumption of sacralized food in an impure state desecrates the sacred precinct. See also MILGROM, *Leviticus 17–22*, 1859, where he suggests other interpretations of this verse.

⁽⁴²⁾ Our discussion of the terms “defile” and “desecrate” thus adds a new dimension to Hurvitz’s comprehensive study, which does not address these terms. See A. HURVITZ, *A Linguistic Study of the Relationship Between the Priestly Source and The Book of Ezekiel* (Paris 1982).

When it comes to the Temple's desecration, however, Ezekiel recognizes a broader definition than that which is used in the Priestly Sources. Desecration constitutes the absence of sanctity, rather than a particular status that is assigned under specifically prescribed conditions. As such, the phenomenon of desecration is far more flexible than defilement. Since it is merely the absence of holiness, any instrument by which holiness is divested from the Temple can be said to desecrate the Temple. Thus, even factors that the Pentateuch does not associate with desecration may constitute agents of desecration at a later period, if they have the effect of divesting the holy precinct of its sanctity.

The flexibility of the concept of "desecration" enabled Ezekiel to introduce factors more relevant to his own period, even though they are not mentioned as "desecrating" factors in the Priestly Sources or elsewhere in the Pentateuch. Thus, whereas in the Pentateuch the desecration of the temenos results from the disruption of the sacred cult, in Ezekiel it usually ensues from the entry of gentiles into the Temple, or of Israelites who have just sacrificed their children to idols.

This conclusion sheds further light on the question of what sources were available to Ezekiel when he wrote his book. Ezekiel was obviously familiar with the Priestly Sources' concepts of defilement and desecration of the sacred precinct, and he simply utilized and adjusted these concepts in accordance with his prophetic needs. There is also evidence for Ezekiel's familiarity with Deuteronomic terminology, as exemplified by his use of the terms *שִׁקוּצִים* and *הוֹעֵבֹת*; that, however, remains a topic for independent consideration.

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SUMMARY

An examination of the passages in Ezekiel related to the "defilement" and "desecration" of the Temple through the spectrum of the Priestly Sources clearly shows a distinction between the two concepts and reveals Ezekiel's precise and deliberate usage of these terms. Although they both relate to idolatrous practices, defilement of the Temple in Ezekiel follows the categories of the Priestly Sources, and thus results primarily from corpse impurity and idol worship. With regard to the Temple's desecration, Ezekiel introduces the aspect of the intense involvement of foreigners, which he viewed as the desecrating agents of his day.