

Desecrating the Temple of God

To “desecrate” is to “violate the sanctity of” or to “treat irreverently or contemptuously often in a way that provokes rage on the part of others” (Webster’s). There have been a couple of notable occasions when the Temple of God has been desecrated...

Manasseh, the son of king Hezekiah and Hephzibah, became king over the two southern tribes of Israel that were called “Judah” after the nation split. He was the first king over Judah after the northern ten tribes, called “Israel,” were captured and annihilated by the Assyrians in 722 B.C. Manasseh became king at only twelve years of age (a little under 700 years before the time of Christ), and reigned for 55 years, 2Chronicles 33:1. In the first part of his reign, he was a very wicked king who “*mised Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to do more evil than the nations whom the Lord destroyed before the sons of Israel,*” 2Chronicles 33:9. In addition to practicing *child-sacrifice, witchcraft, divination, sorcery*, and multiple forms of *idolatry*, he also “*built (idolatrous, PCS) altars in the house of the Lord*” and “*built (idolatrous, PCS) altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of the Lord,*” 2Chronicles 33:4-6. He was severely punished by God for these atrocities after refusing to repent. However, he did eventually repent, and was restored to power. He then tried to “undo” all the evil he had done. In many ways, it was too late, for his son who followed him on the throne- surely influenced more by his father’s wickedness than by his repentance and efforts toward restitution, led Judah right back into idolatry and paganism. Manasseh’s act of placing idols *in God’s Temple* was a grave *desecration* of it, and an *abomination* (utterly disgusting) to God.

Another case of *desecration* of the Temple occurred a few hundred years later, during the 400 years between the events of the last book of the Old Testament, Malachi, and the beginning of the New Testament record with Matthew. **Antiochus IV (aka, “Epiphanes”)** had inherited a portion of Alexander the Great’s (by then divided and mostly defunct) Greek Empire from his father, Antiochus III. The portion controlled by Antiochus IV included western Babylonia and Syria, while the Ptolemies controlled Egypt. Unfortunately, the “prize” between these two regions was Palestine, and Judah specifically. Antiochus IV was determined to “Hellenize” (convert to Grecian culture and worship) the Jews living in Judah. When some of them resisted his efforts, he flew into a rage and killed, or captured and sold into slavery, some 80,000 Jews in and around Jerusalem. Not being satisfied with this, and being determined to “convert” the Jews to Hellenism, he also renamed the Holy Temple of God as “Jupiter Olympus,” erected an idol in it to the Greek god Zeus, and replaced the altar with a Grecian version on which he “sacrificed” a God-fearing Jew on December 16, 167 B.C. This was surely a *desecration* of the Temple of God on epic proportions!

While we can legitimately be aghast at these historic *desecrations* of the Temple of God by both the wicked Judean king, Manasseh, and the evil Seleucid king, Epiphanes, note also 1Corinthians 6:19 in a similar connection, “*Or do you not know that **your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit** who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own?*” The “*temple*” to which Paul refers is not the physical structure of our previous examples of desecration, but the *temple* of our own physical bodies. These can be “desecrated” by sin, and specifically in this context, by *sexual sins* (please read 1Corinthians 6:12-20).

Our modern society, in its “evolved” state, has relegated sexual sins (sex *before* and/or *outside* of biblical marriage) to being *outdated* at best, and *irrelative* and *inapplicable* at worst. However, God doesn’t agree! Please consider carefully 1Thessalonians 4:3-7, “*For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God; and that no man transgress and defraud his brother in the matter because the Lord is the avenger in all of these things, just as we also told you before and solemnly warned you. For God has not called us for the purpose of impurity, but in sanctification.*” We don’t have to build *idolatrous alters* in a holy place of worship like Manasseh, or offer *human sacrifices* in God’s house like Epiphanes, to desecrate the *temple of our bodies* and become an *abomination* to Him. All we have to do is listen to society and abandon God’s laws of purity and marriage through sexual immorality! (Philip C. Strong; Southport Church of Christ; 7202 Madison Ave, Indianapolis, IN 46227; online at southportcofc.org; email to mrpcstrong@hotmail.com)