

The second name-defiling activity is less clear, because the meanings of all three words in *pigrē malkēhem bēmōtām* are debated. In 6:5 the first lexeme, *pēgārīm*, had denoted the corpses of idolaters strewn about their idols, a sense familiar from other occurrences in the OT, and corresponding to the common meaning of the Akkadian cognate, *pagrum*. Assuming consistency of usage, many interpreters recognize in the present context an allusion to royal graves located in the vicinity of the temple precinct.⁵¹ But no such tombs have been discovered near enough to the Solomonic temple grounds to be considered defiling to the temple; moreover, most of the kings were buried “in the city of David,” some distance removed from the temple area. In the light of recent research, *pēgārīm* should be interpreted not as corpses themselves but as some aspect of a cult of the dead. The present usage relates to the pagan practices cited in Lev. 26:30, where *pigrē gillūlīm* seems to refer not to “the corpses/carcasses of idols,” as in the usual understanding, but to some element of the cult of the dead. Whether this involved memorial stelae to the gods erected in honor of kings, or special offerings to the deceased, akin to Akk. *pagru*-offerings, the issue is some sort of ancestor cult.

But one’s understanding of *pēgārīm* is affected by the meaning attached to the following *mēlākīm*. Most commentators treat the expression according to its common usage, “kings,” that is, the past kings of Israel who had not only failed to separate the temple physically from the palace but had also set up memorial stelae for themselves. But there may be more to it. Some see here an alternative designation for *rēpā’im*, a term used by Canaanites to refer to deceased and divinized kings. This usage of *mēlākīm* is admittedly rare in the OT, but it accords with the special use of *mlkm* in Ugaritic texts. Accordingly Ezekiel has in mind the veneration of the deified spirits of Israel’s royal ancestors, analogous to the cult of the dead at Ugarit.⁵⁶ Such cults were based on the assumption that the dead had power over the living, and that proper attention to them by cultic means would ensure a positive influence. While somewhat problematic textually, the third word, *bēmōtām*, “in their deaths,” reaffirms the mortuary nature of the activity. With this statement Ezekiel indicts the former kings for cultic abominations, in addition to the moral sins noted earlier.

Block, D. I. (1997–). *The Book of Ezekiel, Chapters 25–48* (pp. 582–585). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.