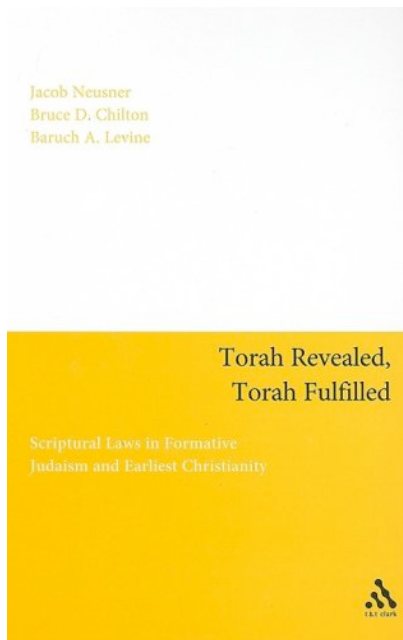


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**Neusner, Jacob, Bruce D. Chilton, and Baruch A. Levine**

***Torah Revealed, Torah Fulfilled: Scriptural Laws in Formative Judaism and Earliest Christianity***

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This is quite an imaginative enterprise: to take six components of Torah law and to describe, analyze, and discuss each from three perspectives—Scripture’s account, the rabbinic reading, and early Christian interpretation. The six components treated in this threefold sequence are “Idolatry and Paganism,” “the Nazirite,” “the Sabbath,” “Dietary Purity,” “Sexual Purity,” and “Lex Talionis.” Levine tackles all six from the perspective of Scripture’s account; Neusner provides the rabbinic reading (except in the last of the six, which is given also by Levine), and Chilton takes responsibility for discussion of the interpretation offered by the New Testament and/or early Christianity.

Levine’s seven treatments are consistently detailed and informative in their analysis of the various biblical texts of relevance. He notes that the emergence of exclusive monotheism from henotheism involved a protracted struggle within Israelite societies over the exclusivity of the cult of Yahweh and that Israelites frequently lapsed into idolatry and had to be rebuked. Very interesting is his exploration of what can be said of “the Nazirite,” including the possibility that what remains is evidence of a deeply rooted aspect of Israelite religion. His study of the history of the Sabbath is fascinating, from early agrarian celebration, where it is characterized positively rather than in terms of prohibited activity

(79); the dominant Priestly legislation is more descriptive of the second postexilic temple of Jerusalem than the first.

Equally fascinating is Levine's study of purity and dietary purity in particular. The logic and language of purity is clearly outlined and the analysis of Deut 14 and Lev 11 illuminating. Levine notes in conclusion that "the prescribed dietary restrictions functioned to maintain social separation between Israelites and other peoples" (123), but analysis of and comment on Lev 20:22–26 would have been welcome. His equally fascinating study of sexual purity, covering, inter alia, incest, adultery, homosexuality, menstruation, and sexual emissions, includes some sharp observations on failure to observe the later law among the patriarchs, on the double standards that, for example, allowed a married man "free to engage in extramarital sex with certain responsibilities imposed, whereas a married woman is most definitely not free to do so" (148), on the absence of prohibition on lesbian sexual activity, and on the widespread notion that menstruation is an infirmity requiring an offering to expiate and cleanse from offense (158).

The final discussion of *lex talionis* and the laws covering retaliation includes the recognition that mutilation was an acknowledged form of punishment in ancient Israel and that retaliation had to be controlled lest it exceeded the bounds of justice. His treatment of *lex talionis* in talmudic law indicates concern to alleviate the severity by (1) limiting *lex talionis* to cases of murder and (2) allowing monetary compensation for lesser bodily injury.

Neusner's discussion of the rabbinic reading of the various Torah laws provides a sequence of typical Neusner treatments. He observes, inter alia, that from a rabbinic perspective, what accounts for Gentile idolatry is their rejection of the Torah, and the surprising degree of hostility to vows in rabbinic halakot (59–60), including the Nazirite vow, with its attempt in effect to claim the status equivalent of a priest, despite not being endowed with that status by birth. Neusner provides a clear analysis and explanation of the principles governing the rabbinic rulings on the Sabbath: that the Sabbath marks the celebration of creation's perfection, when God rested from the activities that marked the days before the Sabbath—so Sabbath as the cessation of activity, doing nothing. The logic, in terms, for example, of intentionality, direct and indirect consequence, the distinction between private and public space, and the device of the *'erub* to extend the private space, are set out with precision and in a way that increases respect for the rabbis more than surprise at the degree of casuistry displayed.

Neusner also provides a helpful clarification of the logic of Mishnah Hullin, dealing with secular food: that Israel the people is to be seen as the locus of sanctification. This is what made it possible for Israel to maintain its holiness after the destruction of the temple and

outside the land (the previous loci of holiness). Since the sanctity of Israel could now be seen to transcend that of temple and altar, the rules ensuring cultic cleanliness could be applied to meat eaten at home: what applies to the altar applies also to the table; food for God and food for Israel should be prepared in a comparable manner. Neusner uses the question of sexual purity in rabbinic tradition as an occasion to clarify and define the rabbinic high evaluation of justice as precise, the exact match of action and reaction: “when God judges, he will match the act of merit with an appropriate reward and the sin with an appropriate punishment” (164); but also, “if the measure of retribution is exactly proportionate to the sin, the measure of reward exceeds the contrary measure by a factor of five hundred” (167). But I would have preferred more on sexual purity as such, not least as a follow-up to Levine’s study of the scriptural material.

Most puzzling, not to say irritating, are Chilton’s “New Testament Interpretation” sections. In each case one would have thought that there was quite enough in the New Testament to discuss in regard to the topics being examined—particularly as several of them were test cases and points of major controversy within Jesus’ mission and the Christianity that began to emerge from within Second Temple Judaism. But for his own reasons, Chilton uses the sequence of six chapters to plough his own distinctive furrows. On “Idolatry and Paganism,” he chooses to discuss various aspects of Justin Martyr’s theology, none of which seem to have anything to do with idolatry. He focuses his treatment of “the Nazirite” on James the brother of Jesus. However, his argument that the New Testament implies that James was a *nazir* is unjustified, interesting though his discussion of Acts 18:18 and 21:23–26 is (66–70). His suggestion that the title given James, “Oblias,” should probably be translated as “mourner” (64) sets aside without due attention Hegeppus’s own translation of the term as “rampart.” His association of Jesus the Nazarene with specifically Nazirite concern for purity goes too far, and when he claims that “the practical meaning of the Nazirite vow [for James] superseded the metaphorical vision of Nazirite championed by Mary Magdalene” (73), speculation has become just too fanciful.

Chapter 9 is another odd piece: it is entitled “Sunday in the New Testament,” but references to Sunday are marginal and incidental to the essay. The principal focus is on the gift of the Spirit and the significance of Pentecost, including its significance for the extension of the new (Pentecostal) movement to non-Jews. Typical of Chilton’s procedure and speculation is his thinly based supposition that this emphasis on Pentecost was a distinctive feature of Petrine theology and an indication of its and his influence in primitive Christianity. But why nothing is said on the role of the Sabbath in the New Testament, in Jesus’ mission, and the Pauline mission and on the transfer of the significance of the Sabbath to Sunday baffles me.

In chapter 12 Chilton again ignores the linking theme of dietary purity—a theme prominent in the New Testament and surely calling for careful discussion—and chooses instead to give a brief exposition of his own distinctive and somewhat maverick understanding of how the (Christian) Eucharist emerged. This includes six types of Eucharist in the New Testament. The first two were practiced by Jesus in his fellowship meals (here an important nod to the purity theme), and the “last supper.” The latter is interpreted as Jesus claiming that wine and bread were a better sacrifice than what was offered in the temple (135; hence Neusner’s description of it as the “mimesis of sacrifice”), but no mention is made of “covenant,” which Chilton excludes from his reconstruction of what Jesus said. Equally arbitrary are his identification of a third type (blessing of bread at home; Acts 2:42, 46), which he classifies as “Petrine,” and a fourth type (Eucharist as a Seder), which he attributes to the circle of James (without any justification that I could see). Taking up Morton Smith’s classification of Jesus as a “magician” is more provocative than illuminating.

Chapter 15 has nothing to do with sexual purity but finds four models of sexuality in Christian history: (1) Jesus’ opposition to conventional family and his recognition of women; (2) the embrace of family and the silence of women (in early Christianity); (3) Augustine’s transformation of sexuality into gender; and (4) contemporary feminist reappraisal of gender significance. This is all done too briefly and without discussing other issues in each of the four phases, which would have had much greater bearing on sexual purity. The lack of focus on the New Testament and the questions raised by a passage such as 1 Cor 7 is disappointing. The final chapter in turn ignores the issue of *lex talionis* in the New Testament (such as Matt 5:38–42), apart from a brief reference to Rom 12:18–21, and slides off into a discussion of love as the center of Christian ethics, though making the good point that the innovation in Jesus’ teaching lay in the claim that love of God and love of neighbor were indivisible: “love of God *was* love of neighbor, and vice versa” (227).

Overall, despite the value of the first two contributors’ contributions, the volume as conceived is a failure, and the chance to make a really significant contribution to the comparative study of the Torah in Hebrew Bible/Old Testament, rabbinic Judaism, and the New Testament/early Christianity has been lost. Despite a degree of interest in Chilton’s distinctive ideas and speculative reconstructions, it remains a puzzle why the other contributors did not insist that his contributions properly complemented their contributions by focusing on the particular components of the Torah law on which they presumably had agreed to write.