

## **Biblical Law Section**

### **Abstracts for 2008 Session: The Rhetorical Use of Biblical Law in New Testament and Related Early Christian Texts (part II)**

John Welch

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*The Legal Character and Purpose of the Book of Acts*

My paper argues that the book of Acts should be understood predominantly as a book about legal affairs. Indeed, the Greek name for the book of Acts is not the Erga (works or deeds) of the Apostles, but the Praxeis of the Apostles, which can be understood as the "Lawsuits" or "Legal Affairs" of the Apostles. Almost every episode in the book is either essential to or is an account of some kind of lawsuit or legal matter. Seeing the dominant legal characteristic of the book of Acts exposes its rhetorical purposes and techniques, for example, in establishing the legal independence of Christianity from Judaism, in charting important legal precedents, and in reassuring early Christians that even though they might be arraigned before various magistrates of the law (either Jewish or Roman) they will be vindicated before men or beatified by God. In addition to discussing legal themes and rhetorical methods of the book of Acts, I will review bibliographically the importance of legal topics throughout the New Testament.

David Stewart

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*Regulating the Gentile Other: The "Apostles" Read the Priestly Work*

The Apostolic Decree of the putative Jerusalem Council, found at Acts 15:19-21, 29 and 21:25, appears to read two prior Priestly texts. The question resolved—Shall Gentile converts keep Jewish Law?—finds answers through reading Genesis 9 and its Holiness Code commentary in Leviticus 17-18. Pauline commentary in 1 Corinthians 5:1-11:1 enlarges on and adumbrates the several elements of the decree. Collectively, these form a Bakhtinian chain of utterances, or better, a great chain of reading. Genesis 9:1-7 with its blood rules, followed by the Yahwistic story of Ham's incursion on Noah's nakedness, provide fodder for commentary at the beginning of the Holiness Code. Leviticus 17 elaborates the blood rules into five laws; Leviticus 18 picks up the theme of the father's nakedness. In the Genesis passage laws are given to all humanity, or a curse passes to progeny; in the Holiness Code, laws of blood handling apply to resident aliens as well as citizen Israelites. The text of Acts signals the sources of the decree not only by similarity in topics—eating blood, offering blood sacrifice to idols, and generalized porneia— but also by appropriating a biblical convention for quotation—Seidel's rule, or the inversion in the phenotext of elements from the genotext.

Richard Averbeck

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*Patterns of Presence and Cleansing in the Old and New Testaments*

Leviticus 12-15 contain cleansing regulations for regular impurities (cleansing by water, e.g., Lev 15:16-18), irregular impurities (cleansing by blood; e.g., Lev 12), and severe impurities (expulsion from the community and then cleansing by water and blood; e.g., Lev 14:8-20). The concern is to “keep the Israelites separate (nzt; or ‘caution’ them, zhr, SP, LXX) from their uncleanness so they do not die . . . by defiling my tabernacle which is in their midst.” It is all about the LORD’s tabernacle presence in their midst (Exod 40:34-38). The Day of Atonement follows immediately (Lev 16) as the annual day of tabernacle and community purgation. In all their Jewish-ness, the New (or Second) Testament writings stand in various patterns of continuity, discontinuity, and transformation in regard to divine presence and cleansings. This extends from the birth of Jesus (Luke 2:21-24, blood) and the baptisms of John and Jesus (Luke 3:1-9, water; cf. John 1:19-34, 3:5-6; 3:22-4:2; Acts 1:5; 19:1-7) to the sacrificial death of Jesus (Luke 23; cf. Acts 21:26 with Heb 9:13-14), and on into the church as the Holy Spirit indwelt (John 1:14 with 17:22 and Eph 2:19-22; 3:14-21, etc.) and purified people of God (Luke 3:16; Acts 2:38; 1 Pet 1:22ff, etc.).

Jay Sklar  
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*Num 15:30-31 as Background for Heb 10:26*

Heb 10:26 states that in some cases there "no longer remains a sacrifice for sins". This paper considers how Num 15:30-31 might relate as background to this verse. The paper will begin with a consideration of Num 15:30-31 in its original context before proceeding to discuss its use in Second Temple Judaism. These observations will then be related to Heb 10:26 itself.