

FYS 16: Third Essay  
Length: 1,250-1,500 words

Rick Griffiths, ex. 3533  
Earth Sciences 306

Dates:

Nov. 11-13: Editorial conferences

Office hours: Tues. 2-4; Fri. 10-12

Nov. 14 (Sun.): Final draft due by e-mail by 5:00 PM

## The Blood of the Covenant

<sup>4</sup>Moses wrote down all the words of the LORD. Early in the morning he built an altar at the foot of the mountain, and erected twelve sacred pillars for the twelve tribes of Israel. <sup>5</sup>He sent the young men of Israel and they sacrificed bulls to the LORD as whole-offerings and shared-offerings. <sup>6</sup>Moses took half the blood and put it in basins, and the other half he flung against the altar. <sup>7</sup>Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it aloud for the people to hear. They said, 'We shall obey, and do all that the LORD has said.' <sup>8</sup>Moses then took the blood and flung it over the people, saying, 'This is the blood of the covenant which the LORD has made with you on the terms of this book.' (Exodus 24)

<sup>26</sup> During supper Jesus took bread, and having said the blessing he broke it and gave it to the disciples with the words: 'Take this and eat; this is my body.' <sup>27</sup> Then he took a cup, and having offered thanks to GOD he gave it to them with the words: 'Drink from it, all of you. <sup>28</sup> For this is my blood, the blood of the covenant, shed for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you, never again shall I drink from this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in the kingdom of my Father.' (Matthew 26)

The Gospels present Jesus as presiding over GOD's completion of the covenants made with Israel through Noah, Abraham, and Moses. These covenants ("testaments") are like a treaties or pacts that provide divine protection in exchange for meeting certain conditions; in effect, the covenants offer deliverance in perpetuity.<sup>1</sup>

**>In the Book of Matthew how does the forming of the new community restage and transform the violence and destruction needed to deliver the Israelites from Egypt and form them into a nation?**

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<sup>1</sup> See Richard Elliott Friedman, "Torah and Covenant," in the *Oxford Study Bible*, pp. \*154-\*163. Cf. the martyr Stephen's account of covenants of the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants in the Acts of the Apostles, chapter 7.

In the question I emphasize how the old order is taken apart because both texts present that process more concretely than they describe the new order. Similar concreteness about the negatives characterizes many narratives of liberation, perhaps because stories base themselves so much on conflict. For example, our sense of how King Odysseus' restored kingdom will work remains vague and unresolved (what's in it for Penelope and Telemachos?) compared to the excitement of purging the suitors and disloyal slaves. Morrison's *Beloved* unsparingly details the losses for individuals and the "beloved nation" out of which hope can be achieved. I focus on this concreteness because the element of prophecy or vision seems particularly bound up in readers' experience with later developments in doctrine that I will not evaluate or judge, as well as with problems in translation (see binder notes, p. 213). Even the word "love" in the Gospels blurs what are separate terms in the original Greek. What I can counsel and evaluate is how you use textual evidence.

### Some suggestions about the assignment:

Unlike the second essay, this assignment does not ask you to balance "pro" and "con" in building an argument. This question asks you to synthesize a great deal of information, that is, to find the best way to organize and describe the many descriptions (i.e., images, themes, prophecies) of violence and destruction in both Exodus and Matthew. Note that the words "restage and transform" put the focus on where the Gospel works most directly from Exodus or at least parallels it closely. That focus spares you the burden of surveying *all* instances violence and destruction in both books.

Some questions to ask in thinking your way toward an argument. Don't feel obliged to answer these questions directly; I mean them only to help you think your way into the topic:

What is problematic in the violence and destruction in each? The e-mailed comments have offered many questions about the methods of the LORD in Genesis and Exodus. The reading questions point out some issues, e.g., in the following statements by Jesus:

"Blessed are the peacemakers; they shall be called God's children" (Matt. 5.9).

"You must not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword" (Matt. 10.34).

"All who take the sword die by the sword" (Matt. 26.52).

What is being created? Defining the goal should give you leverage on the means.

What images do the texts use to organize the issue? It may or may not be helpful to take a lead from the concrete images that the texts use. If the question concerned care and protection, one might focus on the symbol of the shepherd. Obviously blood figures importantly on this topic (see above), though in complex and changing ways.

Do you have textual evidence? As with any other assignment, you need to have specific textual evidence for your contentions. Be careful not to support your argument up from traditions or beliefs for which you cannot provide scriptural backing.

### **Secondary sources:**

The resources available on about scripture are boundless and full of sectarian assumptions. The point of the assignment is to distill an issue from Exodus and the Book of Matthew and I recommend that you stay focused on that. The notes and the articles in the *Oxford Study Bible* are reliable, and should be cited if used.

### **Intellectual honesty:**

Please consult *Intellectual Honesty* on the course CMS page. Use of secondary sources, including the Internet, is not required or encouraged. All sources used should be cited. The reading questions, material from discussion, and e-mailed questions/comments can be taken as common knowledge and need not be cited. I refer any suspected plagiarism to the Office of the Dean of Students. When in doubt, please contact me.