Hi,

I hope you are doing well this week. Perhaps you are even getting out a bit. Patti and I were surprised by the amount of traffic on our trip to Houston; Texas is opening up. But I know it will be a long path to anything approaching normalcy.

* We’ll begin a new series in my Sunday class (noon on my Facebook page): *The New Testament in Seven Sentences*. It should give us a lot to talk about. I hope you can join us then.
* The links to my on-line classes, the video recordings of the classes, the class audio podcasts, and the archive of these daily emails can all be found at [www.scottengle.org](http://www.scottengle.org/). All the postings are up-to-date.

Who doesn’t like a love story? Here is one that, at first glance, doesn’t seem to be a love story at all. (Be sure to read Eugene Peterson’s reflections at the end of the essay.)

**Hosea 1:1-9 (NIV)**

**The word of the Lord that came to Hosea son of Beeri during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and during the reign of Jeroboam son of Jehoash king of Israel:**

**When the Lord began to speak through Hosea, the Lord said to him, “Go, take to yourself an adulterous wife and children of unfaithfulness, because the land is guilty of the vilest adultery in departing from the Lord.” So he married Gomer daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son.**

**Then the Lord said to Hosea, “Call him Jezreel [meaning “God sows”], because I will soon punish the house of Jehu for the massacre at Jezreel, and I will put an end to the kingdom of Israel. In that day I will break Israel’s bow in the Valley of Jezreel.”**

**Gomer conceived again and gave birth to a daughter. Then the Lord said to Hosea, “Call her Lo-Ruhamah [meaning “not pitied”], for I will no longer show love to the house of Israel, that I should at all forgive them. Yet I will show love to the house of Judah; and I will save them—not by bow, sword or battle, or by horses and horsemen, but by the Lord their God.”**

**After she had weaned Lo-Ruhamah, Gomer had another son. Then the Lord said, “Call him Lo-Ammi [meaning “not my people”], for you are not my people, and I am not your God.**

The opening verses of Hosea certainly don’t read like a love story. God tells Hosea that he is to go find an adulterous woman, marry her, and be a father to her children. Nothing about affection or courtship -- just go and do it. The only portion of the book that deals with Hosea’s personal life is 1:2-10 and 3:1-5. Even here, the Hebrew is ambiguous and scholars are all the over the place on how best translate it. Is Gomer a prostitute as some translations have it, or is she “merely” promiscuous? Is she promiscuous before she marries Hosea or only after? But if we keep in mind that we are getting the story of two relationships in parallel, Hosea/Gomer and YHWH/Israelites, then we can get the author’s point.

Hosea is to enter into a marriage covenant with a woman who is not faithful to the covenant, committing adultery with other men. Similarly, God has entered into a covenant with the Israelites and they have been unfaithful to that covenant by committing adultery with foreign gods. The way that makes Hosea feel is the way it makes God feel, but Hosea is to be faithful to Gomer as God is faithful to Israel.

*Covenant betrayal and a surprising response*

If you’ve spent much time in the Old Testament, you know that the people’s idolatry, the worshiping of foreign gods and idols, was a BIG problem during the long decline of Israel and Judah. In the biblical view, this idolatry, along with the people’s abandonment of social justice, explains the decline of the Israelite kingdoms and their eventual destruction.

The story of God’s response to this covenant betrayal is told through the marriage of Hosea and Gomer in chapter 2. The expected anger, judgment, and punishment await the adulterous Israel (2:1-13). Yet, that is not the end of the story. We are also told that God will win Israel back by showering her with tender affection (2:14-23): “Therefore I am now going to allure her; I will lead her into the desert and speak tenderly to her . . . On that day, says the Lord, you will call me ‘My husband,’ and no longer will you call me ‘My Baal’” (Baal being the chief god in the Canaanite pantheon). The same emotional playing out of betrayal, forgiveness, and restoration is found in chapter 11: “How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, O Israel? . . . My heart recoils within me; my compassion grows warm and tender, I will not execute my fierce anger . . . for I am God and no mortal, the Holy one in your midst, and I will not come in wrath.” (11:8-9).

The over-arching Old Testament story is that of covenant betrayal, judgment, and restoration. Nearly every OT prophet comes bearing a word from God about the coming destruction of unfaithful Israel, but also brings a word of hope and restoration. The people will have to bear the consequences of their betrayal, but God will one day restore them as his people, putting things right for them and for all of creation. It is this restoration (a.k.a. the coming of the kingdom of God) that the Jews are so anxiously awaiting in Jesus’ day. It is the proclamation of God’s kingdom, this restoration, that occupied much of Jesus’ ministry and was accomplished in his death.

We can see that this is somewhat like a marriage between a man and woman that has been rocked by unfaithfulness. It is hard and hurtful, marked by anger and despair. Yet, the couple makes it through, emerging on the other side with a marriage stronger than before. Is this really possible? With God, all things are possible!

*True love*

In *The Message*, Eugene Peterson writes, “Hosea is the prophet of love, but not love as we imagine or fantasize it. He was a parable of God’s love for his people lived out as God revealed and enacted it — a lived parable. It is an astonishing story: a prophet commanded to marry a common whore and have children with her. It is an even more astonishing message: God loves us in just this way—goes after us at our worst, keeps after us until he gets us, and makes lovers of men and women who know nothing of real love. Once we absorb this story and the words that flow from it, we will know God far more accurately. And we will be well on our way to being cured of all the sentimentalized and neurotic distortions of love that incapacitate us from dealing with the God who loves us and loving the neighbors who don’t love us.”

*Book recommendation*

Hal Kurkowski has kindly recommended another book to us. Here is what Hal wrote:

“A few years ago, I came across an interesting book called “Born on Third Base”. The book is written by a “One Percenter” who dives into the issues of income inequality, institutionalized advantages to certain classes of people, etc. The origin of the title comes from a quote from Barry Switzer – believe it or not, yes, **that** Barry Switzer. He was quoted one time as saying that “Some people are born on third base and go through life thinking they hit a triple.”

It is a very thought provoking read, regardless of where you fall on the political spectrum. It might cause you to rethink some of your opinions regarding wealth, poverty, position, inherent privilege, etc. Some of what is discussed in the book has had some bright light shed on it due to the current COVID situation.”

‘til tomorrow, grace and peace,

Scott