

February 20th, 2022 - "The Arrest and Charging of Israel" - Hosea 4:1-19

Two weeks ago we concluded the narrative saga of Hosea and his prostitute wife, Gomer, the real-world analogy to illustrate God's relationship with his people. In Hosea chapter 2, we were introduced to a command to the children to "prosecute your mother, prosecute her," and here in Chapter 4 we see the beginning of that prosecution - the arrest and charging of Israel.

The opening statement is an arresting statement. The *shima* imperative is an arresting statement. It is communicated in a way that arrests the audience from its current attention toward what the prophet is about to say. The *shima* imperative is most famously used in Deuteronomy 6, in which Moses commands his audience, "*Shima Yisrael* - Hear, O Israel, the Lord your God, the LORD is one. And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength."

There is a very famous - or perhaps infamous - song in the 1990s by a gentleman by the name of Robert Van Winkle. The song is all about himself, highlighting his vocal abilities and ability to entertain an audience, and especially his ability to solve problems. He assures his audience that if there is a problem, yo, he will solve it. The introduction to this song contains a line that every '90s kid knows, and it is an arresting command: "Alright stop! Collaborate and listen!"

Stop what you are doing and pay attention to me!

And while Mr. Van Winkle (also known as Vanilla Ice), while his imperative is infinitely less authoritative than the God of the universe, we understand what an arresting statement sounds like. "Stop in the name of the law!"

So we see a much more serious arresting statement in Hosea 4 than Mr. Van Winkle's, who simply wants people to know that he can both rock a mic like a vandal AND light up a stage and wax a chump like a candle. No, the *shima* imperative in Hosea 4 is arresting the nation of Israel and letting them know charges are being brought forward.

The word translated as "controversy" in the ESV translation is the same root word we saw in Chapter 2, which implies NOT an emotional appeal, but a prosecution. It is not, "beg earnestly with your mother" in chapter 2, but "Prosecute your mother! Prosecute her!" So here, the same root word is implying legal action: Hear the Word of the LORD, you sons of Israel, for the Lord is bringing charges against the inhabitants of the land."

This is serious stuff. This is a covenantal lawsuit - a covenantal criminal case. For those familiar with Semitic covenantal customs, you know how serious this is. For those that aren't, I'll remind you of the Abrahamic covenant in Genesis chapter 15, in which God passes through a pathway of animal carcasses cloven in two. What is being communicated here contractually is the covenanters pledge, "if I break my promise, may I be cloven in two - eternally separated even from myself - put to death and scattered in pieces." Bloodshed was required for the enactment of the covenant, and bloodshed was required as punishment for breaking the covenant.

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So the Israelites already know the stakes when they hear these charges being brought against them. They know the sentence if convicted as guilty.

But what is fascinating about the people of God throughout the Old Testament – but really throughout time – is that though we know the sentence for breaking this covenant, we continue to think we can get away with it. Time after time in the Old Testament we see God's people breaking the law – committing adultery, whoring after other gods, vassals committing treason against their suzerain – knowing full well the punishment for that sin. The people of Israel – God's people – are not ignorant in their sin. They commit sin with malice aforethought.¹

Some of you may have seen television shows that highlight "America's Dumbest Criminals," and we laugh at people who, for example, try to rob a gun store with a baseball bat, or the arson suspect on the run who sent the police department a more flattering picture of himself because he didn't like the mugshot being used in media posts.

But I contend, none of these people's stupidity compare to people like me, people like the nation of Israel, who know the law of God, are bound by covenant to obey the law of God, know that God is watching our every move, know that God is all-powerful, and all-knowing and still deliberately commit sin against him. We're like a child standing in front of a father, with one hand on an expensive vase, and while staring directly into our father's eyes we push the vase off the shelf onto the hardwood floor, shattering it into a million pieces.

We know what's coming. And yet we do it anyway.

So what are the sins of Israel? What are the charges being brought against Israel in Hosea 4.

There are a number of charges brought forth in the first two verses, and the way they are listed, the prosecution is basically going through the list of the 10 commandments. The charge, "there is no faithfulness or steadfast love and no knowledge of God in the land," covers the first five commandments, and the charge in verse 2 "there is swearing, lying, murder, stealing, and committing adultery," basically cover the rest.

These sins have consequences, the prosecution argues. Not just among and between humans. But dire consequences for the land, for nature, and for wildlife. This is not an "environmentalist" sermon, but it is the case that a people thirsty for murder will not think twice about needlessly depleting a food supply, as the Communist Russian government imprisoned and killed the Kulaks in the 20th century, laying waste to their

¹ The "unintentional sins" described in Numbers 15:22ff are not in question here, but rather this is the prosecution of those "that deliberately go on sinning" (Hebrews 10:26-27). See also Hebrews 9:7, Hebrews 5:2; Romans 7:7ff; Romans 2:14ff.

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farms, depleting the food supply, leading to the death of millions and millions of Ukrainians and Russians. Murderers and adulterers will not think twice about the needless killing of food sources, and a rapacious stewarding of farmland.

Sin results in famine, because sin itself is a famine away from the bread of life.

These charges of sin are so widespread, there is no point in trying to blame another. Everyone is responsible. All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.² Those in charge of justice are mocked for their hypocrisy and injustice, and the prosecution against them is at least just as bad as it is for everyone else. It's actually much worse - for the priests, the pastors, the leaders charged with oversight of the people. And while no man may bring a charge against another, God does attend next specifically to the priests. And what we hear, brothers and sisters, in the prosecution of the pastorate, is certainly applicable today - we don't have to look far to find so-called pastors filling the pulpit who will even admit they don't believe the Word of God. And yet they fill the pulpit, corrupting the minds of their people

Hosea continues against the spiritual leaders: "therefore you shall stumble, you shall collapse in weakness, brought down by your hypocrisy and your lying. You more than others bear the responsibility for the deserved destruction of the people. My people are destroyed, O Priest, O Pastor, for a lack of knowledge because you have rejected knowledge. You have sought the knowledge of the "self" more than the knowledge of the living God, you whoring, so-called priest. You have preached the priority of self-identity rather than an identity in the **knowledge** - the faithful marital relationship - of God. You covetous prosperity preacher, who have taught that God is at the mercy of men, that our good works obligate God to serve us with a reward. You blaspheme your creator with no steadfast love, with no knowledge of God, and you, O Priest:

"You have said in your heart, 'My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth,' not remembering the LORD your God who gives you power to get wealth, as a covenant promise. You have forgotten the LORD your God and go after other gods and serve them and worship them, and you shall surely perish; like the nations that the LORD makes to perish before you, so shall you perish because you would not obey the voice and the law of the LORD your God."³

"The more wealth you have gained, the more you have sinned. You have become partial, showing unjust favor to the rich in order to gain riches; as the rich become more sinful to gain more wealth, you spiritual leaders become more and more indulgent of the rich, feeding on their sin, coveting the lawbreaking of the rich, greedy for their iniquity. For this, you church leaders shall never be satisfied. Your greed will breed more greed until you've wasted all that you have that is important. Your whoring after other gods will not

² Romans 3:23

³ See Deuteronomy 8:11-20

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yield the fruit you desire – because at the end of the day, O bishop, you have forsaken the LORD, making your desires the priority, forgetting your true husband and maker.⁴

“Do you want to know why the people live in sin, O priest? Do you want to know why they look for answers in astrology or enneagrams or secular psychiatry? Do you want to know why the people go to church more for networking and business opportunities? Or send tithes and offerings with a *quid pro quo* attached to them? Do you want to know why your members treat marriage as instantly revocable, or prefer perversion and promiscuity over marital fidelity? Because you priests, you pastors, you spiritual leaders have forgotten God. You do not pant after a knowledge of God. You preach man as the measure, and not our dependence on God. You preach a subjective ethic, not the objective and eternal moral law of God. And this has resulted in the proliferation of sin among the people, for which you are condemned.

“And these people without an understanding of What God Is, and Who God Is, will come to utter ruin.

“You priests, pastors, and spiritual leaders – though you play the whore, seeking after vain philosophies, or seeking to improve upon the sacred and holy Word of God, do not make it worse for yourselves by training others unto blasphemy. Stay out of the pulpit, stay out of the church, stay off social media, and don’t offer spiritual advice in the name of God – you blaspheme the name of God when you do this.

“You so-called priests, pastors, and spiritual leaders, you have made the people stubborn, as inanimate as the golden calf, and just as blasphemous. It is better that you leave the people alone, even though you stare in amazement how bad they have gotten. Shut your mouths, because your spiritual advice at this point will only make things worse. Leave the people in the very sin you encouraged them unto. The wind – the *ruach*, the Spirit – will wrap them in its wings, and they shall be ashamed.”

Brothers and sisters, this is a frightening indictment against the people, but especially the priests. It is terrifying. It makes me as a preacher want to abandon this stage right now, because I know in my heart I have sin, and I am in a position wherein if I **forget God**, by not confessing and repenting of these sins, and panting after a knowledge of him and his law, God has told me, “it’s better that you shut your mouth and leave people in their sin rather than say one more word.”

The prophet Hosea uses the metaphor of the priests as the adults and the lay-people as the children, and spiritual leaders should keep that in mind when they read what Jesus, our great high priest, said in Matthew 18:6, “whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea”—never to open their mouths again; shut up in the depths of the grave of watery judgment.

⁴ Isaiah 54:5

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Praise God that this great high priest has shown us how to preach. We are to preach against sin, yes, but we are also called to preach the good news, the gospel message of the kingdom of heaven.

O, people, maybe you have suffered under a humanistic "pastor," who has encouraged sin in direct contradiction of our final authority, the Word of God. Maybe you have been encouraged to think of "god" as someone whom we elect into that high office, but that someone else's elected "god" and system of morality is just as valid. Maybe you have sat under a spiritual leader who is so obviously political in his ambitions - seeking after wealth and power, indulging the wealthy and powerful even to the point of disobeying the law of God. These types of pastors proliferate sin, they do not hunger and thirst after righteousness.

Churches need pastors today who do not abandon their mandate for spiritual care and give it to the "credentialed psychiatrists," who recognize their need for humiliation, not self-exaltation, who are not afraid of what the world thinks of them when preaching obedience to the law of God, and who aren't afraid of persecution.

Our spiritual leaders should be submissive to the beatitudes we read in our New Testament reading, given by our great high priest, Jesus Christ. They are not above them. Submitting to the beatitudes will guard them, and subsequently the people, against the type of priests in Hosea: Blessed is the priest who is poor in spirit - dependent on God alone - for his is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed is the priest who mourn, especially over sin, for they shall be comforted. Blessed is the priest who is meek, for he shall inherit the earth. Blessed is the priest who hungers and thirsts after righteousness, for he shall be satisfied - not like the priest in Hosea who shall eat luxuriously and is never satisfied. Blessed is the merciful priest, for he shall receive mercy. Blessed is the priest who is pure in heart, for he shall see God. Blessed is the peacemaking priest, for he shall be called the son of God. Blessed is the priest who is persecuted for righteousness's sake - for the sake of the objective moral law of God - for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed is the priest who is reviled and persecuted and slandered **on account of the son of Man** - for defending Christ, his perfect righteousness, and our call to imitate his righteousness - rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven.

Don't think you're off the hook, though, brothers and sisters. Though you may be considered "laypeople" do not forget, men, that you are called to be the spiritual head of your households⁵ - a type of priest in your own home. Do not forget, brothers and sisters, that we are all called to a royal priesthood,⁶ and in all ways to imitate Christ, our great high priest. None of us is innocent. We all have sinned. We all have influenced others to sin.

⁵ Ephesians 5:23; 1 Timothy 3:2; 1 Corinthians 11:3;

⁶ Romans 12:1; 1 Peter 2:4-10; Hebrews 10:19-22

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So let the beatitudes convict you. Let Hosea's prosecution of the priests convict you. Let it move us all unto a desire more and more to die unto sin and live unto righteousness, and seek union with our consummate bridegroom and high priest, Jesus Christ. Amen.

The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. (Romans 16:20)