

Revelation 9:12-21 “What it takes to get the message”

“12 The first woe is past; two other woes are yet to come. 13 The sixth angel blew his trumpet, and I heard a voice coming from the horns” of the golden altar that is before God. 14 It said to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, ‘Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates.’ 15 And the four angels who had been kept ready for this very hour and day and month and year were released to kill a third of mankind. 16 The number of the mounted troops was two hundred million. I heard their number.

“17 The horses and riders I saw in my vision looked like this: Their breastplates were fiery red, dark blue, and yellow as sulfur. The heads of the horses resembled the heads of lions, and out of their mouths came fire, smoke and sulfur. 18 A third of mankind was killed by the three plagues of fire, smoke and sulfur that came out of their mouths. 19 The power of the horses was in their mouths and in their tails; for their tails were like snakes, having heads with which they inflict injury.

“20 The rest of mankind that were not killed by these plagues still did not repent of the work of their hands; they did not stop worshiping demons, and idols of gold, silver, bronze, stone and wood—idols that cannot see or hear or walk. 21 Nor did they repent of their murders, their magic arts, their sexual immorality or their thefts.”

A few famous movie lines have crept into my speech.

I never saw “Gone with the Wind,” but occasionally I’m tempted to repeat the Clark Gable’s lines, “Frankly, my dear . . .” though I rarely finish them.

Our text reminds me another well’-known quote:
“What we have here is a failure to communicate.”

Is my recollection correct?

A stern Southern prison warden said that to a likeable, but stubborn prisoner after repeated efforts to change the inmate failed:

“What we have here is a failure to communicate.”¹

**Revelation 9 tells of a “failure to communicate.”
God created the Universe and put us here to honor him.**

He gave us human creatures the privilege of possible advancement to His Cosmic praise-choir.

Instead of communicating the honor, some of us think we should star in the show.

The Universe and Creation should serve us.

Spotlights should gleam on us.

Most of us consider ourselves intelligent, rational people; smart enough to figure out life.

But would rational folks assume that the Cosmos should work to please us?

When we arrived, the Universe had probably existed billions of years.

God likely designed it to remain billions more; we human beings amount to blip-term visitors.

Imagine a guest coming to your place for a few days and expecting everyone to wait on him or her.

¹ I think this is correct from the movie, “Cool Hand Luke.”

Is it reasonable to think the world should turn to keep us happy?



Many make a second illogical assumption.

We occupy minuscule spots in this Cosmos.

That sun that “comes up every morning” belongs to a huge group of stars known as the Milky Way.

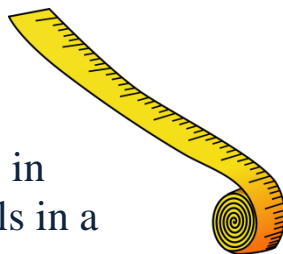
Astronomers tell us that millions of galaxies exist similar to our Milky Way.

The Milky Way galaxy alone contains an estimated two hundred billion stars like our sun.

Because of the distances between stars, astronomers and physicists rarely use miles as a measurement.

Using miles for stars compares to measuring the distance from Des Moines to Denver in inches.

Astronomers compute star distances in light-years—the distance light travels in a year—about six trillion miles.



The nearest star in the Milky Way is about four light years away from us—i.e. 24 trillion miles.

In this immensity, do we correctly assume the Cosmos should revolve around us?

A few years ago I thought about trying to calculate relative proportions.

I hoped to calculate the number of cubic feet in the Cosmos.

Then I’d compare that total with the number of cubic feet any of us occupies.

What percentage of the Cosmos does a single person occupy?

My computer doesn’t show a fraction enough zeros.²

I went from thinking I’d calculate the number of cubic feet in the entire Cosmos to figuring the cubic feet in only one cubic mile of space.

That’s one mile long, one mile wide and one mile high.

Quite a “come down,” isn’t it?

One cubic mile contains 147,197,952,000 cubic feet.

A 200 lb. football player occupies about 3.2 cubic feet.³

Per just one cubic mile, a 200 lb. person occupies a space so insignificant, it’s mathematically zero--0.0000000021914 percent.⁴



² Source, Roger S. Jones, *Physics for the Rest of Us*, Consider that the estimated diameter of the cosmos is 30 billion light years—30 billion times six trillion (180 sextillion miles).

³ Our daughter Stephanie helped me find this calculation.

⁴ I am grateful to former math teacher Kathy Wankum for helping me with these figures.

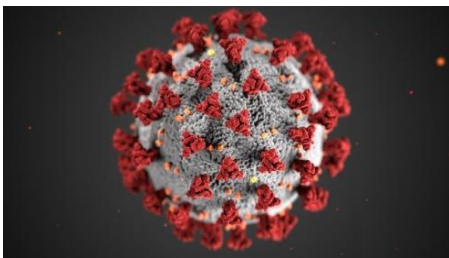
Compare one cubic mile with the total cubic miles in the cosmos and it might take a hundred miles of zeroes to find your percentage.

Are we as rational and logical as we like to think we are?

That truth should humble us.

Considering our body size, length of time here, and limited physical capacities, all of us, including scientists, should speak modestly.

Roger S. Jones was Morse Alumni Distinguished Teaching Professor of Physics in the School of Physics and Astronomy at the University of Minnesota. In 1992 Jones wrote:



“Scientists today suffer from a lack of humility toward nature and its complexity.”⁵

Now about, 28 years later, do you wonder how many scientists feel humbled by their recent encounter with the Corona virus?

That formerly unknown microscopic infectious agent has perplexed, confounded, befuddled, bamboozled, and baffled the best of them

⁵ Roger S. Jones, *Physics for the Rest of Us*, Fall River Press, New York, p - 302.

We recently suggested reading Leviticus chapter 26 and other Old Testament texts.

- **Of all books in existence, the OT remains in a class of its own as: “How not to do it” manual.**
 - **The New Testament stands alone: “How to do it. Believe and follow Jesus.”**



The Bible diagnoses the human situation this way: “They knew God, but they wouldn’t worship him as God or even give him thanks. And they began to think up foolish ideas of what God was like. As a result, their minds became dark and confused.”⁶

We can trace the evil that we see and experience two sources:

- 1. First, is failure to acknowledge God.**
 - Lots of folks pay God lip service.**
 - Few really acknowledge Him.**

⁶ Romans 1:21 NLT

Kind of like the five year old boy
who called his uncle and asked him,
“Can you tell me who God is?
They don’t know here at home.”⁷



We avidly follow many interests:

We’re attentive to golf, guns, TV, music
fishing, sports, the weather, corn and bean
prices and right now, Covid-19 mortality rates
We don’t spend much time acknowledging
God—glorifying our Creator.

**We want our kids to and grandkids to know
how to find a job, how to play first base, and
how to get good grades.**

We’re less intent about their knowing God.
I confess that I failed at this as a father.

We praise and admire bright people:

- The “geniuses” who think they understand the economy and politics;
- The brilliant minds, who unravel the mysteries of DNA viruses, bacterium, and black holes ;

We honor those who search outer space for answers.
Who create vaccines and explore the floor of the sea.

We glorify tall men and women who shoot hoops
and strong guys who throw, catch, run tackle and hit.

**We spend little time acknowledging the
Creator of outer and inner space.**

**God gives us humans beautiful, comfortable
surroundings.**

We all enjoy free earth rental, dependable heat,
water, and air supply.

Long before He put us here, God enriched the soil
beneath us so that it supports life, and he supplied
this planet with abundant energy resources.

**Yet in our time, few people
acknowledge Him.**

**We can trace evil to a second error—ingratitude;
we rarely thank Him and give Him credit.**

Imagine owning large land areas and letting folks
live rent free and supplying all their basic needs.

**But after a while, most of the people on your
land refuse to acknowledge you as owner and
they never thank you for your generosity.**

They behave as if they own your place.

In addition many of them begin mistreating
their fellow residents.

**Would you remind them of their gratis status?
Would you warn them that they are
jeopardizing their relationship with you?**

⁷ Johanna L. Klink, *Your Child and Religion*, p -87

The Bible informs and reminds us of our temporary, dependent standing.

The Book of Revelation teaches a humble worldview.

Today’s text both warns folks who neglect to honor God and consoles those trying to do right.

This text encourages faithfulness to our Creator:

- **warns us to faithfully honor God;**
- **cautions us about taking others off course and away from him.**
- **God created the Universe and put us here to honor him.**⁸
- He gave us the privilege of singing in his praise-choir for a time.

I do not know what Hebrew or Aramaic word Jesus used when he pronounced woes on folks.

One Hebrew word for woe is pronounced “oy.”

Revelation’s Greek word is “ouai.”

Both sound like natural expressions of repugnance and disgust.⁹

One “uoai” has already been voiced.

Now come two pitiful “ouais.”



The sixth trumpet-bearing angel sounds his horn.

The “voice coming from the horns” of the golden altar that is before God” probably represents the Lord speaking.

The altar represents God.

Recall chapter 6, when the Lamb opened the fifth seal?

The souls of those who had been slain because of their witness cried for justice.¹⁰

They were told to be patient and await the fulfillment of God’s plan.

When the sixth trumpet sounds, God starts punishing folks, but not with the final Judgment.

Like a “warning shot across the bow,” concerning not acknowledging Him, the Lord commands:

“Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates.’¹⁵ And the four angels who had been kept ready for this very hour and day and month and year were released to kill a third of mankind.”

The Euphrates River long stood as the northeastern border of the Promised Land.

On the far side of the river lived fearsome, dreaded enemies (Assyrians, Babylonians, and Parthians).¹¹

“Troops” had been waiting at the Euphrates.

⁸ Revelation 4:11, 5:13

⁹ The formation of a word that imitates a sound is known as onomatopoeia.

¹⁰ Revelation 6:9-11

¹¹ See Jeremiah 49:32, 36; Ezekiel 37:1-14; Daniel 11:3, 4. The four winds represent God’s Judgment on evil.

The Lord says “It is time to charge.”

To the ancients, two hundred million troops was an unfathomable amount.¹²

“17 The horses and riders I saw in my vision looked like this: Their breastplates were fiery red, dark blue, and yellow as sulfur.”¹³

It sounds as if horses and riders were indistinguishable.

Like Hell’s Angel conjoined to their Harleys.

Only these warriors don’t wear black tee-shirts with matching headbands; impregnable armor covers riders and horses.



Fiery red, dark blue, and yellow like sulfur, they expel fire, smoke and sulfur.

Power resides in both heads and tails of the horses.

What does this horrific scene symbolize?

This seems to describe inner struggles of purpose, meaning, and guilt that many fight right now.

Consider the warnings the Lord gave Israel about what would happen if the people neglected to honor him.

Does this mind-state sound familiar?

“The LORD will give you an anxious mind, eyes weary with longing, and a despairing heart.⁶⁶ You will live in constant suspense, filled with dread both night and day, never sure of your life.⁶⁷ In the morning you will say, ‘If only it were evening!’ and in the evening, ‘If only it were morning!’—because of the terror that will fill your hearts and the sights that your eyes will see.”¹⁴

Properly honoring God restores our souls.

Only he has eternal existence.

Only he is worthy to receive honor and glory and power.

In the same way that God created fixed physical principles, he also set unchanging moral laws.

When things got to a certain point, God punishes folks for their resistance to his principles.

At what level of immorality does God decide to severely punish a nation?

God alone judges...

I do not know the hearts of other people.

The prophet Elijah thought he was the only good person left; the Lord informed him that there were still 7,000 faithful people.¹⁵

¹² The word number is arithmos (arithmetic); army or troops (strategy).

¹³ These are close to the basic colors; magenta, cyan, and yellow.

¹⁴ Deuteronomy 28: 65-67 NIV

¹⁵ See 1 Kings 19, especially verse 18.

The symbolism found in our text is difficult but every reader understands the closing verses:

“The rest of mankind that were not killed by these plagues still did not repent of the work of their hands; they did not stop worshipping demons, and idols of gold, silver, bronze, stone and wood—idols that cannot see or hear or walk. Nor did they repent of their murders, their magic arts, their sexual immorality or their thefts.”

1. The Lord continually warns us not to get involved in the world’s sin.

“Come out from them and be separate, says the Lord.”¹⁶

What is sin?

Matthew 5-7 & 23, Romans 1, 1 Corinthians 6, and Galatians 5 clearly describe what to avoid and what to include in our lifestyles.¹⁷

2. Caution two: heed the first warning.

That’s partially what this chapter tells us. The plagues were sent to warn people.

¹⁶ 2 Corinthians 6:17:

¹⁷ Romans 1:18-32 describes the descent of immorality that begins with: “Although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him,” verse 21. Those who feel justified because they do not sin as they see others doing should take note that verse 29 includes gossips and slanderers, two things that often occur in church circles, especially among preachers.

The armies of plagues destroyed a third of mankind.

Sadly, “The rest of mankind that were not killed by these plagues still did not repent of the work of their hands.”

How does the world react to the Lord’s warnings?

Many preachers fear calling anything wrong.

- They worry about being branded as bigots.
- Some church groups value money over morality.
- People accuse leaders of being outdated and stodgy.

Preachers in the past encountered opposition.

Note this from Isaiah about 700 BC:

“These are rebellious people, deceitful children, children unwilling to listen to the LORD’S instruction.

They say to the seers, ‘See no more visions!’ and to the prophets, ‘Give us no more visions of what is right!

Tell us pleasant things, prophecy illusions.

Leave this way, get off this path, and stop confronting us with the Holy One of Israel!”¹⁸



¹⁸ Isaiah 30: 9-11

We heed the Lord’s warnings. His Word guides us, not human wisdom.

That leads to our third caution:

3. “Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall.”

Word haughty means “high:”

“He was riding high just before his fall.”

I am not advocating that we protest, march, write letters, or get angry.

The Lord deals with human pride in His time.

He is the Judge.

We lovingly warn people; we do not despise them.

- **I pray that we shall change the things in our own lives that lead us away from God.**
- **That we freely confess our belief in our Creator wherever we are.**
- **And that we trust and hope in his son Jesus, who died and was raised from death.**

I also pray that we make better choices than Isaiah’s contemporaries;

“In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength, but you would have none of it.

You said, ‘No, we will flee on horses.’”

Modern translation: I’ll just get into my vehicle and get away to where I don’t have to face this. I will stop going to church where they say things that I do not like to hear.”



I pray that we shall all listen to the Word of the Lord.

To do otherwise invites disaster now and in the age to come.

God bless you as you freely, genuinely praise God our Creator and place your faith in his beloved Son Jesus!

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