



# TEN BILLION CROSSES

How one cross replaced them all

By Ken Horn

Lucius<sup>1</sup> stood on the hot paved surface of the Empire's best-known road. He had traveled many miles and he was weary. But, as tired as he was from his travels, he found his spirit was more drained than his body. For two days, on his trip to Rome, the scenery had been relentlessly the same. And now he stood at the edge of the road, looking toward Rome; then, turning to look back toward Capua. As far as he could see, in both directions, men hung on crosses.

# TEN BILLION CROSSES

Roman roads were superb feats of engineering. There were 50,000 miles of them crisscrossing the ancient Roman Empire. It was said that all of them led to Rome, the hub of the empire.

The roads were primarily intended to serve the military. Rome's legions traveled from the capital to the provinces to enforce the law. But multitudes of others also traveled the hard, mostly paved surfaces.

Slaves carried goods for their owners. Crowds of lower class laborers used the roads for daily treks to farms or other work sites. The upper class might travel in lavish carriages or in litters borne by slaves or beasts of burden. Commerce flowed along the roads. Traders led donkeys carrying goods in panniers slung across their backs or pulling carts and wagons.

Couriers, government agents, athletes, even tourists negotiated the well-worn lanes. Sometimes officials forced locals to carry their baggage. Jesus mentioned this practice in the Sermon on the Mount: "If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles" (Matthew 5:41, NIV).

## Six thousand crucified

The most famous of the roads was the Via Appia, or Appian Way, which connected Rome to the southern port city of Brundisium. One of history's grimmest spectacles took place along this great thoroughfare. Lucius was but one of a multitude to view it. In 71 B.C. the 132 miles from Capua to Rome became the staging ground for the public crucifixion of some 6,000 men — slaves who had revolted under the slave-gladicator Spartacus.

**One crucifixion  
will surpass the  
spectacle of  
the 6,000 killed  
100 years earlier.**

Culture and brutality maintained an uneasy coexistence in the Roman Empire. Romans devised the most cruel and humiliating of all slow deaths for enemies of the empire — crucifixion. Because no vital organs were pierced, death on a cross was agonizingly slow. A victim could linger for days. When the authorities had had enough, the victim's legs would be broken. Unable to support his weight with his legs, his lungs could no longer function and he would suffocate.

The suppression of the slave army — men fighting for their freedom — saw Rome at its most ruthless. Six thousand men were tortured slowly, on the command of Roman General Crassus, and no one who traversed the great road could avoid repeated intimate encounters with the suffering. Over the 132 miles, a man groaned in agony every 116 feet, every 39 yards — nearly three victims for every length of a football field.

Lucius would have stopped at one of the numerous inns

the Via Appia offered. The unkempt, ramshackle rest stops fed and boarded people and pack animals. One wonders how keen travelers' appetites would have been after passing so many dying and mutilated men ... with the prospect of more of the same when the journey was resumed.

## Crucifixion of the One

Fast-forward one century. Rome has grown and changed. But things are about the same on the violence front. Anyone seen as an enemy of the empire could expect no mercy. Crucifixion and gladiatorial combat are still parts of common life.

One crucifixion about A.D. 33 will surpass the spectacle of the 6,000 killed 100 years earlier.

The Roman province of Judea was no Rome. It was considered a backwater of the empire, a nowhere place that caused the Roman authorities trouble disproportionate to its size and significance. And the crucifixion site of Golgotha was no Appian Way. Yet this out-of-the-way place of horror would command more attention than the locus of the mass execution. Indeed, Golgotha would become the best-known place of death in the world.

It was here that, on Friday of Passion Week, Jesus of Nazareth was brought to be killed. But Jesus suffered acutely before He ever reached the Place of the Skull.

"So Pilate ... delivered Jesus, after he had scourged Him, to be crucified" (Mark 15:15, NKJV).

The Gospel writers do not go into detail. Their original readers would have needed no description. Jesus was scourged and crucified. But even the process of scourging was horrendous.

The degree of its horror was not captured for the camera until the brutally realistic, difficult-to-view scenes of *The Passion of the Christ*.

The flagrum, the Roman whip used for the purpose, consisted of several balls of metal or fragments of bone attached to leather thongs. It literally flayed its victims.

Not all criminals were scourged, and certainly few who were scourged suffered through the additional tortures of Jesus' all-night travail. He became so weak that He could not bear His cross, which was most likely the crossbeam, or patibulum. The road He traveled would exceed the fame, or infamy, of the Appian Way. It became immortalized as the Via Dolorosa, the Way of Suffering.

Arriving at Golgotha, Jesus would have been nailed to the crossbeam, which would then be attached to a stationary post, or stipes, in the ground. The crucifixion would begin.

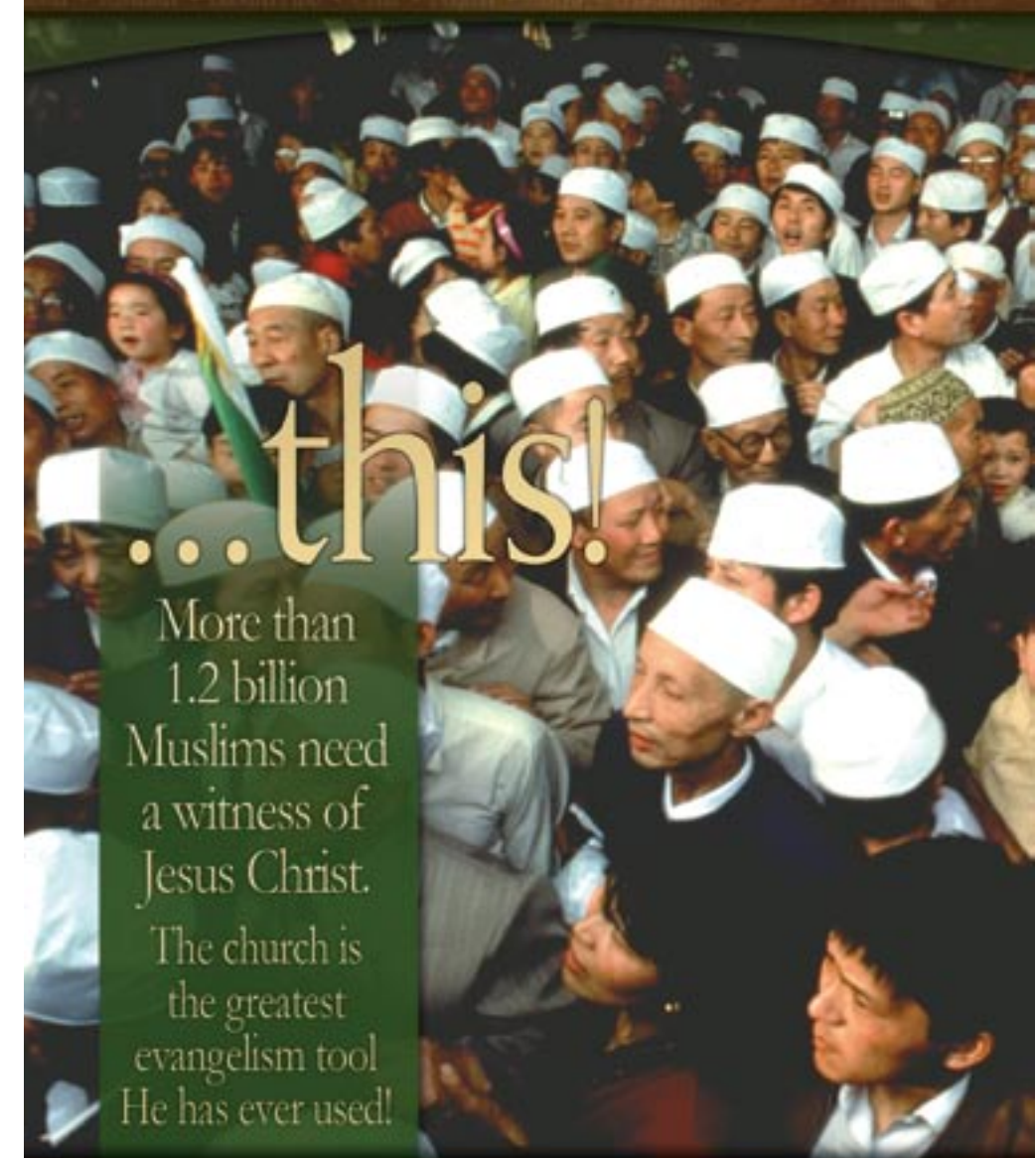
No more loving and compassionate words have been spoken than the first words of Christ from the cross: "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do" (Luke 23:34). Indeed, they did not know. Had they known, I doubt they would have crucified the Son of God. Note the response of the centurion after Jesus died: "Truly this was the Son of God!" (Matthew 27:54).

It was no easy thing that Jesus suffered for us. Some think His sufferings were less because He is God. But they were certainly greater, so great that He cried, "My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46).

During the process, Jesus did not escape the physical torment any

Our Greatest Opportunity

OUR GREATEST OPPORTUNITY?  
PLANTING 1,000 CHURCHES  
IN THE MUSLIM WORLD  
IN PLACES LIKE ...



Will you help plant His church?

A church can be planted for as little as \$1,600. Anyone can help. Call us at 417.866.3313 or write to the address below to learn how you can help plant a church.



Center for Ministry to Muslims

P.O. Box 2730 • Springfield, MO 65801 • [www.cmnequip.org](http://www.cmnequip.org)

# TEN BILLION CROSSES

## ABCs OF SALVATION

To know God and be ready for heaven, follow these steps:

**A. Admit you are a sinner.**

"There is no one righteous, not even one ... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Romans 3:10,23 (See Romans 5:8; 6:23.)

**Ask God's forgiveness and repent of your sins.**

"Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." Romans 10:13 (See Acts 3:19.)

**B. Believe in Jesus** (put your trust in Him) as your only hope of salvation. "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." John 3:16 (See John 14:6.)

**Become a child of God by receiving Christ.**

"To all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God." John 1:12 (See Revelation 3:20.)

**C. Confess that Jesus is your Lord.**

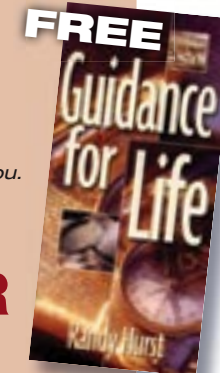
"If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." Romans 10:9 (See verse 10.)

For further help, contact the Assemblies of God church near you.

If you would like someone to pray with you concerning your decision to follow Jesus Christ, please contact the church indicated on the back cover or call:

**1-800-4PRAYER**

Assemblies of God National Prayer Center



The thief was right. Jesus was the only human being to ever live whose life was sinless. And yet He died for the entire sinful human race, more than 10 billion souls, because they could not pay the price of salvation. "He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world" (1 John 2:2).

human would feel ... not until He cried, "Father, 'into Your hands I commit My spirit'" (Luke 23:46).

**Jesus chose to stay on the cross**

While on the cross, Jesus' enemies taunted Him verbally: " 'He saved others,' they said, 'but he can't save himself! He's the King

*He could have called ten thousand angels, But He died alone, for you and me."*

Ray Overholt, who penned these words, didn't know that a legion could be as many as 6,000 men. This would make more than 70,000 angels. But the number is not intended to be precise. Whatever it would have taken to come down from that cross, Jesus could have done it.

But if He had done that, there would have been no atoning sacrifice for our sins. The fate Jesus would have given up was a fate we deserved. He went to the cross so we wouldn't have to. "Now it was Caiaphas [the High Priest] who advised the Jews that it was expedient that one man should die for the people" (John 18:14, NKJV).

Jesus was a sin offering, the only one that would ever again be needed. "For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Corinthians 5:21). And, "Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree')" (Galatians 3:13).

The difference between Jesus and the two thieves? Jesus was innocent. The thieves were guilty of crimes. One of them realized who Jesus was. "Don't you fear God," he said to the other thief, "since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong" (Luke 23:40,41, NIV).

The thief was right. Jesus was the only human being to ever live whose life was sinless. And yet He died for the entire sinful human race, more than 10 billion<sup>2</sup>

of Israel! Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him" (Matthew 27:42, NIV). Even one of the two thieves crucified with Him "hurled insults at him: 'Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us!'" (Luke 23:39). His followers must have had similar thoughts: *Come down, Jesus. Oh, please, come down from the cross.*

Jesus could have exercised godly power and ended His suffering. "Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels?" He had said (Matthew 26:53).

The old gospel song put it this way:

*"He could have called ten thousand angels*

*To destroy the world and set Him free.*

they are strangers in their homeland  
The majority of Europe's immigrant population is under the age of 25.  
They are marginalized and ignored.

help us pray for europe's immigrant population

www.eyeoneurope.org

souls, because they could not pay the price of salvation. "He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world" (1 John 2:2).

This doesn't mean that everyone is saved; it means that everyone can be saved because of the price Jesus paid. (See the ABCs of salvation in the sidebar.)

On the following Sunday morning, Jesus was resurrected, completing the plan of salvation. When He said, "It is finished" (John 19:30), His words meant that no one ever again would have to suffer for his or her sins.

The apostle Paul described the great victory Jesus won on the cross, and what it means to those who put their faith in Him: "When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross" (Colossians 2:13-15, TNIV).

The cross wasn't a defeat. It was a triumph that disarmed Satan.

The spectacle of 6,000 crosses was a dreadful thing. But the shadows of 10 billion crosses could have covered the earth. Instead, only one was needed. And it is enough. **tpe**

<sup>1</sup> A fictional name for a representative character

<sup>2</sup> A round, symbolic figure

KEN HORN is the editor of *Today's Pentecostal Evangel*.

E-mail your comments to [tpe@ag.org](mailto:tpe@ag.org).