



Bible cities

By David Mason

Reflecting on towns and cities mentioned in the New Testament

Activity time

Try these activities. If you can't get exactly these materials, just see what you can find around the house instead!

1 DOH!



You will need: card; pencils; Playdoh (or cornflour, hair conditioner and optional food colouring); cups and a bowl; large piece of card

Have you ever seen a model made by architects when they are planning a new development? Try and make a model of where you live. Draw a few local roads on a piece of card and then make the buildings out of pieces of playdoh (houses should be about the size of the houses in a game of 'Monopoly').

If you do not have any playdoh (or for a bit of Messy Church Does Science fun), you can make some by mixing two cups of cornflour with one cup of hair conditioner in a bowl. It will soon turn to slime and then if you keep kneading it you should end up with a smooth ball of dough which you can use for modelling. The dough will be the same colour as the hair conditioner you use, but you can change the colour using food colouring. When we did this at our Messy Church, we discovered that, like when you

make meringues, the consistency is correct if you can tip the bowl over your head and nothing pours out over you!

Talk about if Jesus had done this activity as a child, where do you think he would have used as inspiration for his model? The answer is Nazareth. Jesus was born in Bethlehem, but afterwards he lived with his family in Nazareth in Galilee. They probably lived in a humble home and he would have had to work hard as a carpenter to provide money for the family.

2 Cornerstone

You will need: newspaper; cereal box; sticky tape; PVA glue; toilet paper; pencil; paint; paintbrush

Crunch up the newspaper and stuff into the cereal box. Tape down the top of the cereal box. Cover the front of the box with PVA glue and lay strips of toilet paper on it. Stick several further layers on until it becomes wet and pulpy. Use a pencil to carve a design into it (your initials or a picture or even the Messy Church logo). Cover the rest of the box with PVA glue and stick just one layer of toilet paper to the other sides. Leave to dry and then paint it any colour you like but paint the carved grooves of your design a darker colour. If you make several you can use them to make a wall!

Talk about how, when you look at big important buildings in a city, there is normally a stone near the base of the building with a sign on it saying when it was laid and who laid it (usually the mayor or somebody important). But that is not the first stone that is laid. When work starts on a building the cornerstone is the first stone laid and all the other stones are then laid in reference to it (so if it is in the wrong place, the whole of the building will be in the wrong place). When he was teaching in the temple in Jerusalem, Jesus said, 'Have you never read in the scriptures: "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord's doing, and it is amazing in our eyes"?' (Matthew 21:42, NRSV). What do you think he meant? He was fulfilling the prophecy and would serve as the foundation of the church as well as for each Christian's individual life.

Under King David, Jerusalem became capital and holy city of Israel, and it is where King Solomon built the temple. Jesus visited Jerusalem many times during his ministry, and it was here that the church came into being at Pentecost.

3 Magical mystery tour

You will need: candle; paper; paint; paintbrush

Using the candle, draw a map on a piece of paper. You will not be able to see what you have drawn, but if you mix up some watery paint to paint the piece of paper, the details of your map should appear.

Talk about how the apostle Paul visited many cities during his missionary journeys and would have definitely needed a map and would also have needed to keep his route secret from the authorities. On his first missionary journey, he visited Antioch in Syria, which was the third largest city in the world at the time. He then went on to Perga, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe (NOT Derby!) in what is now Turkey. He undertook four other missionary journeys, visiting such places as Thessalonica, Athens, Ephesus and Rome. He also wrote lots of epistles (letters) to the churches in different places offering them help and advice (Paul would have loved email).

4 Garden city

You will need: cardboard boxes; coloured paper or wrapping paper; PVA glue; paint

Get together a collection of different-sized cardboard boxes (my neighbours all save theirs for me as they know I need them for Messy Church). Cover them with paper and decorate the smaller ones to look like

houses and the larger ones to look like office blocks, churches and shops. Place them round your garden or play area to make a 'model village'. If there is a box big enough for you to get into, you can build your own house.

Talk about whether you have ever been to a model village. To make your model like a city in the Bible, you would need to add a wall round it and strong gates. Cities then were usually built on high ground, protected by a ring of walls, with a rampart leading up to the city gates. Inside the walls were houses of varying shapes and sizes, but also large, important buildings that covered a substantial part of the walled area. Among these were the temple and the palace, often at the centre of the settlement or in a prominent position. All the houses were accessible via narrow alleys. What do you think a city needed most? Water! In Jerusalem, underground tunnels were used to bring water into the city. So you can now ask people 'Why is Messy Church like cities in the Bible?' – 'Because they all require a good supply of water!'

Celebration

Song

We read in Genesis that God created the world and all that is in and on it, so everything we make and build comes from that. You could say that God is the ultimate builder. So, to the tune of 'Bob the Builder', we can sing

God the builder,
Can he build it?
God the builder,
Yes, he can!

God the builder,
Can he fix it?
God the builder,
Yes, he can!

God the builder,
Can he help us?
God the builder,
Yes, he can!

God the builder,
Can we thank him?
God the builder,
Yes, we can!

Quiz

Who knows anything about the following places?

ATHENS

BETHANY

BETHLEHEM

BETHPHAGE

CAESAREA

CAPERNAUM

EMMAUS

JERICHO
JERUSALEM
NAZARETH
ROME
THESSALONICA

Answers

ATHENS – Cultural centre of Greek civilisation and university city where Paul preached.

BETHANY – Home of Martha, Mary and Lazarus just outside Jerusalem.

BETHLEHEM – A few miles south of Jerusalem; where Jesus were born.

BETHPHAGE – Near Bethany; where the disciples collected the donkey for Jesus for his entry into Jerusalem.

CAESAREA – On the coast of Palestine where Paul was imprisoned.

CAPERNAUM – Beside Lake of Galilee; where Jesus was based during his ministry.

EMMAUS – On the day of his resurrection, Jesus appeared to two disciples on his way to Emmaus.

JERICHO – Jesus gave Bartimaeus his sight and Zacchaeus was converted; the parable of the good Samaritan was set on the Jerusalem to Jericho road.

JERUSALEM – Jesus was presented at the temple here when he was 12 and visited many times thereafter; his trial, crucifixion and resurrection took place here.

NAZARETH – Where Mary and Joseph and their family lived.

ROME – Capital of the Roman Empire; Paul was imprisoned here.

THESSALONICA – Important city in Northern Greece visited by Paul; he also wrote two letters to the church there.

Game

Now try building a church. Smaller children should form the walls by standing in a square. Larger children and/or adults form the roof by standing behind the smaller children and raising their arms, and one stands at the front with his/her arms raised to form a spire. Get everyone involved and then say, 'So we have got a church but where are the people?' The answer, of course, is that they are the church!

Prayer

Dear Lord,
This world is your creation given to us.
Thank you for this AMAZING gift.
Help all who live here to get to know you
So that we may see you more clearly,
Love you more dearly,
And follow you more nearly
Day by day.
Amen

You could say the [Lord's Prayer](#) and the [Messy Grace](#).

Mealttime

Cottage pie. You could also make gingerbread houses using gingerbread (ordinary plain biscuits will also work) and stick them together and decorate them with icing. And what about some (we built this city on) sausage rolls?