

# Emmaus: a tale of two trailers



## If money were no object

One of the most imaginative presentations of the 'big story' of the biblical narrative currently in circulation is the Emmaus Road Show, conceived originally as a dream by Howard Roberts, when about to be made redundant. The idea was to illustrate Bible stories for children using contemporary methods of presentation in a variety of child-friendly learning environments. I will let Howard tell his own story ...

Howard recalls: I was coming to the end of several years in the back office, setting up the Shoresh study programme for Christian visitors to Israel, and I was not sure what to do next. Paul, a colleague at work, asked me, 'If money were no object what would you really like to do?'

The dream came back to me. 'I know,' I said with a wave of enthusiasm that rather surprised me, 'I'd like to get two large trailers, turn one into an airline cabin, and in the other illustrate the lands of the Bible as a backdrop to teaching. Then we could bring our study tour experience to those unable to go there, 'flights' and all.'

I added, jokingly, 'You don't know of anyone with any aircraft seats for sale do you?' Paul did! A friend at his church was disposing of parts of an ex-demo passenger plane on behalf of British Aerospace which was closing its Hatfield operations. So, with an inspiring dream, a verse of Scripture that focused on hope, and a set of pristine aircraft seats at a bargain price, (but next to no funding), the mobile exhibition project was begun.

## 3-D images

The office phone rang. Would I organise a tour of Israel for just one person – a photographer with a stereoscopic camera? After a moment the penny dropped. Wouldn't projected 3-D slides be the ideal way of depicting the Holy Land in the exhibition? A very timely donation of £500 bought a custom made 3-D camera and a return ticket to Tel Aviv. I took off for Israel on a photographic mission that was to include a flight over Jerusalem in a light aircraft, perfect for some spectacular 3-D images.

Before I finally left the tour office a letter arrived from a Twickenham film studio. They were offering for sale a valuable model of New Testament Jerusalem. The following day I had an appointment with someone I had known since he had run a Christian centre at the most probable site for Emmaus, along the ancient Roman road between Jerusalem and Joppa. He generously purchased



the model for the project, and confirmed the idea that the exhibition should be called the Emmaus Road Show.

### Royal Mail delivers a miracle!

But we needed vehicles to house the project. In response to only one letter expressing our need, the Royal Mail presented us with a box trailer with interior dimensions well suited to fitting out as an 18-seat aircraft cabin. The first of the children's presentations would take the form of their 'in-flight' movie.



As work on that trailer's fitting out was nearing completion, a friend went to buy a pot plant from a garden shop run by the Shaftsbury Society. Parked nearby was their own exhibition lorry, a tractor unit with a high-sided trailer. Being for sale, moderately priced and tall enough to house a 3-D theatre and our Jerusalem model, it was bought for us without delay.

After months of intensive activity and the help of many skilled friends, with the two trailers fully refurbished and seating 36 visitors, the road show was launched in March 2000, taking both young and old on a virtual pilgrimage of biblical sites.

### Journey into space

Since then, feedback from pupils and teachers has prompted a number of modifications, including a futuristic spaceship compartment and an internet cafe. Now more geared towards school audiences, the road show offers a simulated journey starting in outer space; a virtual descent to earth by shuttle; a coach tour of Bible lands; and an opportunity to explore further using multimedia computers.

At the controls of the Starship Revelation, pupils working in pairs first assist the pilot retrieve a pod containing a Bible databank, sent up from earth. Then before transferring to the space shuttle they investigate the databank's files. These set the scene, introducing them to key characters of the

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Old Testament period: Abraham, Moses, David and Solomon, and also to the past expectation of a messianic figure. The program includes a mini-game and quiz questions.

### Back down to earth

Once earthbound in the shuttle cabin, a wide-screen video presentation illustrates events that led up to the birth of Jesus and his early childhood. Towards the end of the descent to the spaceport, pupils have the opportunity to answer a few questions on individual flight logs.

Then, issued with special 'sun-glasses' passengers aboard the tour coach view, in full colour 3-D through the 'windscreen', scenes from the life and teaching of Jesus of Nazareth, while travelling throughout Galilee and the Jordan Valley, to arrive at Jerusalem. Then the big screen presentation is enhanced by the extensive spot-lit model of the ancient city, as the Easter story unfolds.

This three-stage journey is followed by a visit to the Cyber REsearch cabin. A suite of nine multimedia workstations enables pupils to discover what happened next, with customised software tracing the lives of Peter and Paul, and outlining the main developments in how the Bible came to us, touching on the work of Wycliffe and Tyndale.





## Meet the team

The exhibition is managed by a team of Trustees, led by David Edgington, a retired Head of RE from Watford Grammar School for Boys, a frequent reviewer for *ACT Now* and for six years a Director of ACT. The Executive Director is Howard Roberts, a trained teacher and at one time, Assistant Director of the Bible Comes to Life exhibition. Trustees include a retired Deputy Head of a St Albans primary school, and a serving RE Co-ordinator in a middle school at Oakley near Bedford. All Trustees are committed Christians.

Developing this project has been a struggle at times. Thankfully, although we've come to expect problems at every turn, we also expect to receive the Lord's guidance on how to overcome them. We remain grateful to Our Saviour for both the original vision and for ongoing provision. And, excitingly, not all that was seen in the original dream has yet been realised, so the way ahead beckons. In this sense, keeping the show on the road reminds us of Jesus' walk to Emmaus.

■ David Edgington

## What does it do?

In a schools' culture where Bible stories are not part of many children's background, this series of presentations really does bring these events to life. The road show aims to help children gain an overview of the Bible, providing them with a basic historical framework.

The programme is designed for Years 4 to 7 in Primary/Middle Schools. Does it preach? No. While the presentations have been written and produced by committed Christians, and often sponsorship comes from churches and Christian charities, its aim is to make the Bible more attractive and readable for children, and to help them enjoy its stories. Teachers need have no fears that pupils will be pressurised in any way, or that children from other faiths will feel excluded.

## What does it cost?

The Trustees wish they could offer the presentation free, but with haulage charges continuing to escalate, we propose the following costing arrangements: between £1 and £2 per pupil plus the actual cost of haulage from our Bedford base.

A popular method of funding is for one or more churches in an area to subsidise the event, finding a venue and inviting all eligible children in local schools to attend, who then contribute at an agreed rate, the church sponsors meeting the bulk of the transportation costs.

Clearly, sponsoring churches need to understand that the exhibition is educational in its objective, not dissimilar to assemblies that are regarded as offering both information about one aspect of a world faith and also introducing a sense of 'awe and wonder' to the pupils. It is important that the Emmaus Road Show maintains positive relationships both with RE Teachers, Heads and Advisors.

## Contact information

Emmaus Road Show  
33 Wilstone Drive  
St Albans  
Herts  
AL4 9TT

T: 01727 858869  
E: [howardenmaus@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:howardenmaus@yahoo.co.uk)  
W: [www.emmausroadshow.com](http://www.emmausroadshow.com)

## SAMPLES OF PUPILS' WRITTEN RESPONSES TO THE EMMAUS ROAD SHOW:

>> 'I learnt loads and I think it will really help me with RS learning.' MIRIAM, Y7

>> 'I had a brilliant time and I wish I could do it again.' RUSS, Y5

>> 'I enjoyed it because it was realistic and you make RE into fun.' NATHAN, Y5

>> 'I really enjoyed the show, and it made RE seem interesting.' TILLY, Y5

>> 'Thank you very much for taking me on this wonderful journey, and I would recommend it to a lot of my friends at different schools.' NESTA, Y6