AUTHOR JAMIE BUXTON ON HIS NEW NOVEL TEMPLE BOYS, ONE OF THE MOST FAMOUS STORIES IN THE WORLD

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Jamie Buxton explains the background to Temple Boys.

Temple Boys [3] tells the story of Flea, a beggar and wannabe gang member living rough on the streets of Jerusalem circa 33 CE. Desperate to be included the Temple Boys, the most useless gang in the city, Flea attempts a heist on a visiting magician. However, when the magician turns out to be a dynamic preacher called Yeshua (also known as Jesus), Flea is plunged into a bewildering adult world power struggles and betrayal.

Research, as ever, went far beyond the confines of the story. The Great Temple of Jerusalem fascinated me but in the end hardly features. I'm old enough to have had a grounding in Bible stories from school, and the Gospels offer up four varied accounts of Yeshua/Jesus's life. Wider research covered Judaism, social history for day to day stuff, and archaeology. I couldn't afford a trip to Jerusalem but Google Earth was a big help.

Many times during the writing of Temple Boys I wondered what on earth (or in heaven) I had taken on. It felt transgressive, especially as in my version Yeshua's followers aren't that nice, Judas shows himself to be kind and caring, while Flea, my hero, really does not like Yeshua. At all.

Writing was a long process. I live in hope that one day a book might come from a single pure thought. In fact, fiction only seems to emerge when a dozen barely formed notions and a few enduring obsessions have had a virtual punch-up.

But as Temple Boys grew, it found its own wholeness and truth, and I began to glimpse what it could be: a fresh look at one of the most famous stories in the world, all seen from the point of view of a wild, determined and mildly deranged boy on the cusp of adolescence.

Somewhere between drafts four and five, there was an interesting moment when knew I had a plot ? in my version Flea gets entangled in conspiracies surrounding the crucifixion ? but had not worked out what the story was about. It was discovering this, quite accidentally, that gave the book the emotional clout it demanded.

My hero is a ducker and a diver ? he has no intention of dying on the streets ? but also an honest witness to all the key moments in the extraordinary six day period between Yeshua's entry into Jerusalem and events at his tomb. But what he cannot understand (and it makes his brain practically explode) is why an adult should accept the inevitability of his death when he could choose to live. This is Flea's personal pre-Easter mystery and I hope the book shows that he finds some form of resolution ? but without pat answers.

So my hope is that if my readers take anything away from Temple Boys it is this: whatever life throws at you, hope, like friendship, comes at you in unexpected ways. And if you're sometimes brave, occasionally ruthless and a little bit crazy,
you should do all right in the end.