

## ***Christ in Prophecy***

### **Archaeology 1: “The Importance of Archaeology”**

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#### **Opening**

**Dr. Reagan:** Why is archaeology important in the study of the Bible? Why do archaeologists in general seem to have such a negative attitude towards the Bible? And what is the most important archaeological discovery that relates to the biblical world? Stay tuned for an interview with one of Christendom’s best known teachers of Biblical Archaeology.

#### **Part 1**

**Dr. Reagan:** Greetings in the name of Jesus our blessed hope and welcome to Christ in Prophecy. I am delighted to tell you that Nathan Jones, my colleague and I have as our very special guest one of Christendom’s best known teachers of Biblical Archaeology. His name is Dr. James Fleming and he is from Georgia. James we are just delighted that you would come and be with us today.

**Dr. Fleming:** It is my privilege, thanks.

**Dr. Reagan:** Well we want to start off by just finding out a little bit about you. Would you tell us about your background and also about your credentials so that our viewers will know that you know what you are talking about?

**Dr. Fleming:** Well I feel a little bit self-conscious, but I grew up in an airline family and I could fly free.

**Dr. Reagan:** So that means you flew around a lot.

**Dr. Fleming:** So after I had finished college I thought you know I ought to use these free flying privileges to study overseas. And I went as a student to study in Jerusalem. My reason for Jerusalem is because when I was in college I noticed if you wanted to know what the Bible said about something, I went to a Christian college, make sure you only read one commentary,

because if you read 2 commentaries there's 3 opinions, right? And therefore if you are really going to be serious you need to ask, "What would this have meant in its original time and place?"

**Dr. Reagan:** Okay.

**Dr. Fleming:** So why don't I use some of these free flying privileges to go to Israel for most of the Biblical stories and study time and place, so it was; geography, history, archaeology. And I knew that I wanted to be a teacher and I thought at least geography and history I would be interested in, I wasn't so sure on the archaeology part, you know the things that people made. But I studied with professors from Hebrew and Tel Aviv University, when it came time for a doctor's dissertation I came back to the United States then. But I choose methods of teaching biblical, historical geography, and archaeology with an education doctorate. Even though I ended up with more theology classes on the doctoral level wanting to work and live in the Middle East I thought it would be wiser to have a secular nomenclature degree rather than something that sounded too religious because there is such suspicion there, Jews and Muslims.

**Dr. Reagan:** Yes, afraid you are going to be converting people.

**Dr. Fleming:** Yeah.

**Dr. Reagan:** Well now you lived in Israel a long time didn't you?

**Dr. Fleming:** Actually 37 years.

**Dr. Reagan:** Wow.

**Dr. Fleming:** I went as a student in '69 and then returned as a teacher in '73.

**Dr. Reagan:** Where did you teach there?

**Dr. Fleming:** I taught at what at that time was called the institute of Holy Land studies, now it is called Jerusalem University College. But within a few years I was asked to give classes at the Hebrew University, the main Israeli University in Jerusalem. They have an overseas campus, 3,000 international students. So I taught there.

**Dr. Reagan:** And during that 37 years, would you say you have walked about every square mile of Israel?

**Dr. Fleming:** Actually my first 5 years there I could only afford a motorcycle, I didn't have a car. So a lot of it was motorcycled. But I have a hobby of making relief maps and models and I made a very intentional goal of every text in the Bible where somebody walked from place a to place b to try to walk that in terms of the timing and the scenes and geography, things like that. So it was a great way to learn the land.

**Dr. Reagan:** And I understand you must have had a camera with you most of the time, because you told me before this program started you have over 350,000 photographs of Israel.

**Dr. Fleming:** And unfortunately they were slides, you know back in the old days.

**Nathan Jones:** Oh, yeah.

**Dr. Fleming:** So now you have to digitalize them?

**Dr. Fleming:** I have this poor gal, bless her heart, 4 ½ years digitalizing, she is only half way through, but yes.

**Nathan Jones:** Don't a lot of tour guides owe their abilities to tour Israel because of you?

**Dr. Fleming:** Well, many guides of course learn many things on their own. But I was grateful that for the last 30 years the government of Israel, and I am happy to say and also the Palestinian Authority said, "Why should Jews tell Jews what Christian places mean to Christians? Or Muslims tell Muslims?"

**Nathan Jones:** That's logical.

**Dr. Fleming:** "Why don't we have a Christian teach about guiding Christians?"

**Dr. Reagan:** So you do that for the Israeli tour guides?

**Dr. Fleming:** Yes, yes.

**Dr. Reagan:** And what do you teach about? How Christians view sites?

**Dr. Fleming:** Well, there are general lectures about the life of Jesus. But most of it is taking them on field trips, so at the sites what is important for a Christian group.

**Dr. Reagan:** Okay. You have quiet a facility I think Nathan was going to ask you about your facility there in Georgia.

**Nathan Jones:** Yeah, Explorations in Antiquity Center. I was on their website and it is in LaGrange, Georgia right?

**Dr. Fleming:** Yes.

**Nathan Jones:** And you have, it is like being in Israel right? I mean it looks fantastic, can you tell us a little about it?

**Dr. Fleming:** And you save the flight.

**Nathan Jones:** Yeah, you just have to go to Georgia.

**Dr. Fleming:** No, no I want people to go to Israel, but if you can't make it.

**Dr. Reagan:** Tell people about the center. First of all where is LaGrange Georgia?

**Dr. Fleming:** Okay, it is 45 minutes south of the Atlanta airport. Interstate 85 which goes from Atlanta to Montgomery, Alabama, it is just inside the Alabama border.

**Dr. Reagan:** Okay.

**Dr. Fleming:** And we choose that because the foundation based in LaGrange offered to give us matching grants for the museum, so it was an offer we couldn't refuse, if we built a museum in LaGrange.

**Dr. Reagan:** Okay, so what do you have there?

**Dr. Fleming:** So, this is our fourth place to have a museum of daily life in antiquity. Three times we had to move in Israel, it is difficult for Christians to find property that is available when you are such a minority.

**Dr. Reagan:** And then it is difficult to maintain it with the ups and downs...

**Dr. Fleming:** Yes, in tourism.

**Dr. Reagan:** You know a bomb goes off everybody cancels their trip.

**Dr. Fleming:** And you see it was a museum that was a particularly focused on Christians. We had free entrance for Jews and Muslims wanting locals to come, but it was mainly for Christian pilgrim groups. But like you say perceived danger...

**Dr. Reagan:** You know the first time I ran across you Jim you had a center there on I guess it was Bethlehem road.

**Dr. Fleming:** Yes.

**Dr. Reagan:** Yes. In Jerusalem and you had sites that you could go to where you could see how they dealt with olives, and how they dealt with wheat, and how they ate at a table.

**Dr. Fleming:** Yes.

**Dr. Reagan:** And all these varies things, it was wonderful it was like walking through antiquity.

**Dr. Fleming:** Right.

**Dr. Reagan:** And then you had to leave there and go to Ein Karem which is outside of Jerusalem and that is and we have visited there because you had to leave that and a lady named....

**Dr. Fleming:** So now you have to come to LaGrange, Georgia.

**Dr. Reagan:** So now we have to come to LaGrange, Georgia, we are just following you around.

**Dr. Fleming:** Okay, I am sorry I move so much. A wondering Jew was my father.

**Nathan Jones:** How can people find out about then about it, and then you ministry and the center?

**Dr. Fleming:** Well we have a website that is easy to remember.

**Dr. Reagan:** Just tell them right in that camera.

**Dr. Fleming:** So, diggingforit.com, either the number 4 or f-o-r and that leads you to....

**Dr. Reagan:** Is it diggingforit.net?

**Dr. Fleming:** And it could be .net, .com, .org.

**Dr. Reagan:** Okay.

**Dr. Fleming:** Digforit.net

**Dr. Reagan:** That is easy.

**Dr. Fleming:** And then that leads you to the museum or we have a bookstore too, or things like that.

**Dr. Reagan:** Okay.

**Dr. Fleming:** And it gives you maps and directions and such.

**Dr. Reagan:** Are you open year round?

**Dr. Fleming:** We are.

**Dr. Reagan:** Alright.

**Dr. Fleming:** And we are closed like many museums Sunday and Monday because it is important to be open for Saturday for most people.

**Dr. Reagan:** Yes. Well we are hoping to take a video crew there and do some shooting of you actually teaching at this place.

**Dr. Fleming:** Well you will be glad to know that you are going to feel, "Hey I have seen an olive press like this somewhere in Israel." We have the same kind....

**Dr. Reagan:** It will be a déjà vu experience.

**Dr. Fleming:** We have an area for the life of the shepherd we actually have goat hair tents from the Jordan, Iraq border.

**Nathan Jones:** So they are all authentic then?

**Dr. Fleming:** Yeah.

**Nathan Jones:** Wow.

**Dr. Fleming:** The life of the farmer, so we will have...

**Dr. Reagan:** Well I took a group one time to your site on Bethlehem road and we had a biblical meal.

**Dr. Fleming:** We have a whole area where you can have a biblical meal there are a couple of rooms that are set up for that. And it talks about manners and customs but most important:

What would a Passover meal have been like when the temple was standing. And how can that help us better understand the Last Supper?

**Dr. Reagan:** Jim I have noticed over the years as I have read a lot in archaeology that most archaeologist seem to hold the Bible in contempt as a reliable, historical document. And I would like you to comment on that in just a moment.

**Dr. Fleming:** Sure.

## Part 2

**Dr. Reagan:** Welcome back to our interview of Dr. James Fleming one of Christendom's best known teachers of Biblical Archaeology. Jim right before the break we were talking about the way in which archaeologist seem to hold the Bible in contempt as a reliable, historical document. At least that is the impression that I get from reading a lot of archaeological articles. How about it?

**Dr. Fleming:** There was a period in the mid 1900's where many people had to prove the Bible can be proved by archaeology and the agenda to try to have something specifically approving about the Bible. And reacts to that, your training is at a secular university; you want to convince your scientific colleagues that you are objective and not forcing an agenda. Made them swing to the other side of trying to almost be afraid to make a biblical connection.

**Dr. Reagan:** But you know what gets me about that is if an archaeologist finds a piece of papyrus in Egypt with some writing on it they immediately assume that that is true and that is authentic. And yet here is the Bible one of the best preserved documents of antiquities. In fact the other morning my wife and I were having a devotional we starting reading 1 Chronicles, the first 6 chapters are the most detailed chronologies I have... I mean this is not fairy tales this is detailed chronologies.

**Dr. Fleming:** Sure. What you should say if you are truly objective is that the Bible should at least be considered as an equal source among other ancient sources. Now for someone of faith we would have special trust in its authority. But academically it should at least be taken as a source like any other source and not punished because it was preserved. See if it was lost and then found, okay then it is valuable source, you know. And one of the things and we'll talk about

it later that the Dead Sea Scrolls have showed us is how accurately its memories have been preserved over the centuries and therefore not demeaned in anyway.

**Dr. Reagan:** Yeah, Nathan you had a question.

**Nathan Jones:** Yeah, I was wondering how do you view the historicity of the Bible?

**Dr. Fleming:** Yeah, you know some places in the Bible are meant to be symbolic and they you know, let me tell you a parable about a vineyard on a fertile hill. Or Jesus saying a man went to Jerusalem to Jericho. You are not supposed to say, what was the man's name, what time of year did he travel? But he is using a specific road as an illustration for a parable. Or Isaiah 5 there was a vineyard in Judah well how are vines in Judah grown? And even if you feel some portions of the Bible might be a parable a truth for all times and all places, it doesn't mean the historical and geographical references are not important.

**Dr. Reagan:** Yes, yes.

**Dr. Fleming:** I once had three professors I was asked to take around by Hebrew University and showed Jerusalem because they were considering having, they happen to be from Germany, of having their university bring students to study at Hebrew university. And there was such resistance to think that it was important to visit any place in the Bible, because in their mind many portions of the Bible were not historical. But I convinced them that if you are gonna truly be objective you have to at least at preliminary consider: could this be an historical memory? Your conclusion after that preliminary open to the possibility might be different, but you at least have to be open to that possibility.

**Dr. Reagan:** Well, yes. And quite frankly I get amused at when I read these secular archaeologist because it seems that quite often their purpose is to prove that the Bible is wrong, and it seems every time they turn over a spade of dirt they find something that justifies the historicity of the Bible.

**Nathan Jones:** And they always take the late or the earlier dates then what are traditionally held, too it seems.

**Dr. Fleming:** Well part of that is you have to write a theory that no one else has written. So that your name and everyone will use your dates, you know, ego enters in there some. But you know it is important to at least be open to the possibility that this might be a very accurate remembrance about this time and place so let's go and study that time, study that place, and be



open to that possibility. And for me, I have come to the conclusion that, there for example there are 27 cities named in the Gospels. They are fully named because insight comes to the story if you know where it happened. There are 353 towns mentioned in the Bible. Only a crazy archaeologist would count them, right? But I have a hunch that meaning comes if you know about the place. Otherwise the text would say, "They went to another town."

**Dr. Reagan:** And you and I were discussing something about that this morning, I think it is important. How many are mentioned in the Old Testament? Do you remember?

**Dr. Fleming:** 353, you forgot already?

**Dr. Reagan:** Well I didn't know if that was the whole Bible or just...

**Dr. Fleming:** In the land of Israel.

**Dr. Reagan:** Alright. In the New Testament?

**Dr. Fleming:** 27 in the Gospels, and 83 in the book of Acts.

**Dr. Reagan:** How many are mentioned in Josephus?

**Dr. Fleming:** Now, in Galilee Josephus mentioned in Galilee 46 towns by name.

**Dr. Reagan:** Okay, the reason I am doing this is because you've got all these lists and not one single list mentions Nazareth.

**Dr. Fleming:** Right.

**Dr. Reagan:** So Nazareth had to be a little Podunk town.

**Dr. Fleming:** Yeah, and that is expressed when the excavation is found. Nazareth was 200 to 300 people, unwalled.

**Nathan Jones:** Now it seems like it is the marriage capital of the world, every other store is a bridal shop.

**Dr. Fleming:** Canaan on the other hand was 5,000, so sophisticated city slicker Nathaniel from Canaan. Remember where it says, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Nazareth is a you've got to be kidding place. And when Paul says, Pilot is writing that sign, "Jesus of Nazareth, how do you spell that, n-a-z...." The most important thing to remember about Nazareth is that Nazareth was not important. And then you can understand how a mystery of

our faith is that a man from such a small village without sophisticated things in their town, without you know no university, has 3,000 graduate schools around the world today still discussing his sayings. It is one of the mysteries of our faith.

**Nathan Jones:** God rejoices in the little things right?

**Dr. Reagan:** One of the evidences to me that he must truly have been God in the flesh. Well Jim you have devoted your life now to teaching Biblical Archaeology. Why are you, why do you consider this so important? What is the importance of Biblical Archaeology?

**Dr. Fleming:** If a Christian is serious about their faith, they need to know two worlds very well. They need to know the world of the Bible, their faith document so that they can better understand what those words would have meant in their time and place. And they need to know their world in which they live so we can properly correlate the similar issue today that that ancient text can address, or then in your world this ancient prophecy to understand the world today to make a proper application.

**Dr. Reagan:** Well how about giving us some examples of how understanding archaeology will better help you understand a biblical story or something in the Bible.

**Dr. Fleming:** Well of course every page has those. But for example sometimes a word can be translated two ways, and unless you understand what the original text was you wouldn't know. This is going to be surprising to some of your hearers and viewers of the program, but the word upon and against are the same in Greek. The word; lift up and the word take away are the same. Now vines in the ancient world don't have wire holding up all the branches like modern vineyards. At the Last Supper in John 15 any branch that bears not fruit I will, normally it is translated take-away, but the same word is normally translated actually 75% of the time, I will lift up, it is the word of the ascension story. Well the translator thinks; pictures modern vines already lifted up...

**Dr. Reagan:** Yes.

**Dr. Fleming:** So translated it, I will take away. But it is a very important difference in the meaning between lift up, and take away. Did you know that if a vine has a branch that touches the ground and without wires holding them up they do, it will make its own root.

**Dr. Reagan:** No I didn't know that.

**Dr. Fleming:** And no longer take its nourishment from the deeper mother root of the vine. But so what the vinedresser does is they stick another rock under the vine, another one to lift it up. Abide in me, keep your nourishment coming from my deeper root, I will lift you up so you won't support your shallow own root. But you see this is just one little example but you have to ask, how were vines grown at the time of Jesus, to help interpret the text.

**Dr. Reagan:** Well give us another example; you must be a walking encyclopedia of examples.

**Dr. Fleming:** Of trivia.

**Dr. Reagan:** But they help us better understand.

**Dr. Fleming:** Yeah. Well gosh, a specific discovery for example; grave customs you never throw away old clothing you use it as rags, and you tear them up into strips. And you swaddle infants, you wrap infants, and you swaddle the dead. The word should be grave cloths, not graves clothes because you would wrap a body with torn up strips of cloth.

**Dr. Reagan:** So are you saying the Shroud of Turin is not...

**Dr. Fleming:** As an example you got right to it. In later periods you will have a burial shroud, but in biblical times you would wrap a body. Now when you wrap a body it is fine going up to the shoulders but then you have to come into the neck. So the head wrappings are always a little bit separate from the body wrappings.

**Nathan Jones:** That would explain then why Lazarus had to be untied, he didn't pull off a shroud he had to be untied.

**Dr. Reagan:** Or why there was a separate head wrapping for Jesus.

**Dr. Fleming:** So don't think of, if someone had stolen the body and left the grave wrappings there would be one pile of grave cloths. But if the body wrappings were one place and there was the head wrappings separate from them, this is what made peter believe, right? That the body was gone but the wrappings were undisturbed. Now I don't want to make it a too literal thing because obviously the mystery of the resurrection presence of Christ is the reality much more important than just looking at grave cloths, but aha, that is what it would have meant if you stopped to ask what were burial customs in the time of Jesus?

**Dr. Reagan:** We were talking yesterday when I picked you up at the airport. We were talking about how art sometimes has an impact upon our biblical images, and it is an incorrect impact.

Like the song, “On a Hill Far Away Stood an Old Rugged Cross,” a beautiful song it has tremendous, it’s an artistic interpretation. But it just doesn’t coincide with reality because they didn’t crucify people on hills far away.

**Dr. Fleming:** And, “Up Calvary’s Mountain,” things like that, the hymns.

**Dr. Reagan:** I mean they put them on the road to get an impact, didn’t they?

**Nathan Jones:** Or right outside the gate.

**Dr. Fleming:** The word hill is not mentioned in the text, right? But our hymns are. Now part of this is to elevate the meaning of the cross...

**Dr. Reagan:** Right.

**Dr. Fleming:** That’s why often the middle cross is normally taller than on either side for the theological importance.

**Dr. Reagan:** Yes.

**Dr. Fleming:** But, normally it is along the sides of roads. And usually it is rooted trees.

**Dr. Reagan:** Yes.

**Dr. Fleming:** And that’s why half the text will say, “Crucified on a tree.” It is not just meaning wood, but most crosses, where the criminal carried the crossbar that is the word cross.

**Dr. Reagan:** Yes, the crossbar.

**Dr. Fleming:** And it is fastened to a tree on the side of the road. Did you know that in 6 AD Josephus tells us, he is a contemporary of the time of Jesus, that there were 2,000 crucifixions in 1 day in Jerusalem? It was, and all the trees lining the roads to and from Jerusalem became crucifixion places. So the cross looked much more like a tree than we would picture, you know.

**Nathan Jones:** What was the purpose? Why so many crucifixions along the roads?

**Dr. Fleming:** There was an attempt to revolt against Rome.

**Dr. Reagan:** You put them up close so people can see the suffering and realize...

**Dr. Fleming:** This is what happens to anyone who tries to get out from under Roman bondage.

**Dr. Reagan:** The most realistic depiction that I have ever seen of that was in the movie “Spartacus,” where they had as far as you could see along the road the rebels on crosses.

**Dr. Fleming:** And that’s to of course intimidate the people as they come to the town.

**Dr. Reagan:** Yes.

**Dr. Fleming:** So they were along roads. Now a road could be in a valley it can go up a slope. Many could see from afar distance but it doesn’t have to be a hill, there is also a lower valley you could see.

**Dr. Reagan:** Another example is Leonardo Da Vinci painting of the Last Supper that has been etched in all of our minds and just about everything in that picture is wrong.

**Dr. Fleming:** Church art is the culture of the artist.

**Dr. Reagan:** Yes.

**Dr. Fleming:** Not the culture of the Bible. And people eat at table and chairs in the time of Leonardo so table and chairs.

**Dr. Reagan:** But they didn’t at the time of Jesus.

**Dr. Fleming:** In fact the text actually said they reclined at the table. Remember how much trouble artist had for the beloved disciple leaning on Jesus’ chest, at table and chairs.

**Dr. Reagan:** Yes.

**Dr. Fleming:** Right, they reclined at the table. And so one of the things at our museum is to have replicas, and over 1,000 first century reclining tables have been found in the Mediterranean world.

**Dr. Reagan:** Yes.

**Dr. Fleming:** But we have replicas for people to take pictures of them.

**Dr. Reagan:** And they are not straight tables either.

**Dr. Fleming:** No.

**Dr. Reagan:** They are U shaped.

**Dr. Fleming:** Yes.

**Nathan Jones:** Can people eat at those tables at your museum?

**Dr. Fleming:** Yes, we first of all tried making it with mattresses like it should be on the floor, but we found very few Americans can lie down for an hour and still get up. So we made an authentic one for pictures but we have it like a coffee table in a van so they can support their backs, you know. But we have a U shaped table.

**Nathan Jones:** It would be hard on the arm, yeah.

**Dr. Reagan:** Well I just know that from personal experience that when you go to Israel and you actually see these things it brings the Bible alive in a way. I remember one time when I was in Caesarea Philippi and I read the story to the people of Peter making his confession of Jesus there and then Jesus saying to him, "on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it." And I was told that this huge cavern there was considered by some to be the Gate to Hades. And I could just see him, gesturing there.

**Dr. Fleming:** Any entrances to the underground were called the Gates of Hades.

**Dr. Reagan:** Yes.

**Dr. Fleming:** And that is a grotto, and it was a pagan place of worship. But many times the New Testament is phrased in a way so you can picture, because you know at Caesarea Philippi it is famous for its grotto entering the underworld. And also it is the bottom of a 9,000 foot high mountain, on this rock I will build my church. Jesus probably as a good teacher is using what's around him. Did you know from the Mount of Olives you can see a mountain that was moved, and on the mountain of olives Jesus is speaking to his disciples about faith can move mountains. You can see in the distance from the Mount of Olives a mountain that Herod cut off the top of one and put it on another.

**Dr. Reagan:** Tried to move the whole thing.

**Nathan Jones:** Herodion.

**Dr. Fleming:** In all modesty and named it after himself, Herodion, right? But maybe Jesus hinted just as the empire has slaves to move mountains, faith can move mountains. For the rabbis of Jesus day, a mountain stood for something impossible. Faith can accomplish the impossible.

### **Part 3**

**Dr. Reagan:** My colleague Nathan Jones and I are in the process of interviewing Dr. James Fleming concerning the importance of Biblical Archaeology. On the wall behind me here you see a photograph of a place called Qumran it is located on the shore of the Dead Sea, and at the very top of this barren hill you can see some caves. It was in these caves that the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered in 1947.

**Nathan Jones:** Dr. Fleming, many people consider the Dead Sea Scrolls the most important archaeological discovery of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Would you agree with them?

**Dr. Fleming:** I do because it pre-dates existing manuscripts by almost a 1,000 years.

**Dr. Reagan:** Wow!

**Nathan Jones:** Maybe we can talk about more about that next week?

**Dr. Fleming:** Okay.

**Nathan Jones:** Sounds great.

**Dr. Reagan:** Our time is up so let me invite you to be back with us again next week when we will interview Dr. Fleming in detail about the significance of the Dead Sea Scrolls, and other Biblical Archaeological discoveries, like the City of David. Until then this is Dave Reagan speaking for Lamb and Lion Ministries, saying, "Look up, be watchful, for our redemption is drawing near."

**End of Program**