

Christ in Prophecy

Archaeology 3: “The Eastern Gate”

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Opening

Dr. Reagan: The Eastern Gate of the Old City of Jerusalem is the only one of its 9 gates that is closed. Why is it closed? And when, if ever will it be opened? What is its significance to Bible prophecy, and how does it relate to the location of the Ancient Jewish Temple? Stay tuned for an interview with a teacher of Biblical Archaeology who in 1969 made the startling discovery of the location of the gate that existed before the current one.

Part 1

Dr. Reagan: Greetings in the name of Jesus our Blessed Hope and welcome to Christ in Prophecy. Once again this week, my colleague Nathan Jones and I are delighted to have as our special guest one of the best known teachers of Biblical Archaeology in all of Christendom, his name is Dr. James Fleming. But before I introduce him to you I want to make a few comments about this picture here behind me. This is a photo of the Eastern Gate of the Old City of Jerusalem. It is called the Eastern Gate because it faces east. It is also known by other names, like the Golden Gate. It was closed in the 1500's when the current walls were rebuilt by Suleiman the Magnificent, the Bible indicates that the gate will remain closed until the Messiah returns. Over the years there has been much debate over whether or not the Eastern Gate at the time of Jesus was located here or some other place along the wall. No excavations could be made because of the Muslim cemetery that is located in front of the gate. But in 1969 our special guest on this program, Dr. James Fleming accidentally discovered the location of the 1st Century gate. He is here to tell us that fascinating story and to explain the significance of his discovery.

Nathan Jones: It is great to have you back Dr. Fleming.

Dr. Fleming: Thank you very much.

Nathan Jones: Dr. Regan in his intro said that you accidentally discovered the Eastern Gate. Accidentally?

Dr. Fleming: I hoped you wouldn't notice that part of it, but yes. I can't take any credit for it. I would like to be able to say after years of study and research I finally found it. It was a heavy night of rain in the spring, and ...

Dr. Reagan: This is 1969 now?

Dr. Fleming: ... it is, I was a student in Masters level in Archaeology. And I thought I'd take some pictures of Jerusalem's City Gates. And as I was walking through the Muslim cemetery on the east side of the city I got close enough to look up, I was taking a picture of the arch, and I didn't realize the rain the night before had loosened the stones at the top of a tomb there.

Dr. Reagan: Yeah, limestone absorbs water.

Dr. Fleming: Well, and it was pretty heavy rain too. But just as I went click, the tomb collapsed, so the actual phrase need to be, stumbled upon...

Nathan Jones: There you go that sounds better.

Dr. Fleming:discovering the Eastern Gate.

Nathan Jones: You fell into this tomb?

Dr. Fleming: Yes, and those that know me well think I landed on my head, but no. Fortunately enough stones fell in with me that I could stack them up, climb on it, jump up, and chin myself and get out, because it was no where.

Dr. Reagan: How far down did you fall?

Dr. Fleming: It was an 8 foot drop.

Dr. Reagan: 8 foot.

Dr. Fleming: And it actually was a mass burial grave. There were 46 skeletons. Actually I didn't count them right away, that was after I found out there was enough stones to get out and there wouldn't be 47 skeletons.

Nathan Jones: There are bones all around you, when you were down there?

Dr. Fleming: Probably it had been some disease. I would guess by, there was still some cloth and some cartilage, I would guess it was about 100 years previously, that that burial had been put there. There were not records for that particular grave.

Dr. Reagan: Did you realize immediately the opportunity you had?

Dr. Fleming: Well, as my eyes got used to the dark, I could see beyond the skeletons the back wall of the tomb was the earlier wall, the same line as the one we looked at for Dr. Reagan's introduction, continued 8 feet below ground. And what was amazing is completely preserved stones in nice wedge shape of the top of an earlier gate, meaning that gate is fully preserved.

Dr. Reagan: Do you have any evidence of this? Did you photograph it for example?

Dr. Fleming: Fortunately not only did I get a picture or two but they came out, because an uncharacteristic Middle East efficiency when I brought my archaeology teacher back the next day after class they had already cemented over the tomb.

Nathan Jones: No, really.

Dr. Fleming: And it is because it is a Muslim cemetery, a sensitive place, so I was glad the picture came out. My archaeology teacher, Dr. Kohavi didn't seem that impressed. I think he thought I had landed on my head, until back in these days it was slides you know it took a while to get the picture developed and back, until he saw the picture, and then we realized, that yes. And the spring of that arch coming up is exactly under the left hand arch today which means that the present gate preserves what was probably 2 arches, because it is the first quarter of that semicircle, exactly below the first quarter of the semicircle above.

Dr. Reagan: You know I guess it really wasn't too surprising to find the ancient gate directly below the current one because in most of the excavations in Israel don't they find that they built right on top, and the gates were right on top of each other.

Dr. Fleming: Gates have good memories.

Dr. Reagan: Yes. There is a reason for putting a gate where you put a gate.

Dr. Fleming: And yes, that is usually a road to an important site, like Joffa Gate, or Damascus Gate. And so they tend to be in the relative same part of the wall. What is remarkable is that it is exactly under it, and that this earlier gate is well preserved.

Dr. Reagan: I know some questions that are in our viewer's minds who don't know anything about this part of the world. That one thing would be: How do you end up building gates on top of a gate, are you talking about debris piling up or something? What is going on here?

Dr. Fleming: Yes, you tend to have dumps outside the city. So outside the city wall builds up and so cities need... and the closets we get to that in the US is a new layer of asphalt in front of the house. But in ancient times cities getting higher because the city is getting higher.

Dr. Reagan: But this was particularly true of the Temple Mount, because when for example when they destroyed it, when the Romans destroyed it for example, and well even when the Babylonians did, they pushed debris off the Temple Mount and it built up, and built up, didn't it?

Dr. Fleming: Picture the Temple is on the eastside of the city, and when the Romans cleared it after 70 AD destruction to build a temple to Jupiter they couldn't dump debris north, west, or south because that was still city. But on the east was a steep slope in the Kidron Valley. So the eastern side of the city became a dump.

Dr. Reagan: Yes.

Nathan Jones: Now would Jesus have gone through that gate, or anybody in biblical history gone through that gate?

Dr. Fleming: Well that is another question and we can not be sure. Luke's Gospel gives most details for Palm Sunday; "He descended the Mount of Olives and entered the Temple."

Nathan Jones: It is quite a....

Dr. Fleming: It doesn't say which gate, but what we do have is that some excavations by Charles Warren outside the Old City under the cemetery. He got permission to dig by saying he was going to dig a well somewhere else and then turned directions and did a horizontal well, never heard of that. But he actually found some of the stones from the Temple collapsed wall. He found, that is where one of the stones was that had the warning that a non-Jew should not proceed into the Court of Israel. So we should not be surprised that the debris from the Temple ended up being thrown out in the eastern side.

Dr. Reagan: We've got tons of debris here and you can not excavate it because there is a Muslim cemetery.

Dr. Fleming: In Israelis' law cemetery is considered a religious property, yes. So you would have to have permission.

Dr. Reagan: Yes.

Dr. Fleming: And this time of political tension is hard to imagine it.

Dr. Reagan: So your falling down into a grave was a propitious moment, when you were able to photo and see. Now do you believe that the gate that you discovered below the current one, do you believe it dates from say the time of Jesus?

Dr. Fleming: It was probably there before His time. It is kind of complicated to get into it all now. But below the present gate there is ruins of two other gates, you can see even at ground level, you can see them better inside. We do have sources in the 5th Century AD and one in the 4th Christian sources saying that you could still see the threshold and some of the door posts of the Eastern Gate. So in the Byzantine period the Eastern Gate was a ruin, which means that this is probably just after the Byzantine period.

Dr. Reagan: Okay, now one of the things that is important about this discovery is that there is a lot of controversy about where the Temple was actually located on the Temple Mount. And a lot of that relates to the location of the Eastern Gate. But for our viewers to understand that, I think what we are going to have to do is take a pause here for a moment and come back with a map of that whole area and talk about how the Temple Mount is laid out, where the gates are and so forth and then talk about the location of the Temple. Okay, thank you.

Part 2

Dr. Reagan: Jim I want to talk with you just a minute about the relationship of the Eastern Gate to the location of the Temple. But before we do that I think we need to introduce our viewers to where what we are talking about. This is an outline of what the Old City of, the walls of the Old City of Jerusalem as they exist today. This trapezoid here is the Temple Mount, this red circle here represents the Dome of the Rock, this red line here to the north represents the Eastern Gate, the Kidron Valley runs right down thru here and the Mount of Olives is over here to the right, so the Eastern Gate is looking east. Now Jim some people have argued that according to ancient manuscripts the Priests stood on the steps of the Temple looked over the Eastern Gate to the pinnacle of the Mount of Olives and watched the sacrifice of the red heifer.

And they said, therefore the Temple has to be located up here to the north and can be built without touching the Dome of the Rock. What do you have to say about all of that?

Dr. Fleming: Alright, good question. Not only is the sacrifice of the red heifer mentioned but the Day of Atonement with the scapegoat. The priest's assistance takes the goat out the Eastern Gate and goes up to the Mount of Olives at a point where he can look from the back, from the Mount of Olives into the Holy of Holies. Meaning the door of the Temple is left open and the back of the curtain in the far west side of the Temple. And as he confesses the sins of the people on the head of the goat his eyes are looking to the symbolic presence of God in the Holy of Holies. This made some wonder does that need to be a straight line from the Temple to the Holy of Holies, from the Mount of Olives, and that it would be here. But the tractate about this is called Kippurim.

Dr. Reagan: Now what do you mean by tractate?

Dr. Fleming: This is a collection of Jewish rules about the Feast.

Dr. Reagan: Oral, oral law?

Dr. Fleming: Yes, codified in the 2nd Century AD.

Dr. Reagan: Okay, so one of these mentions what?

Dr. Fleming: Kippurim which is the plural for Kippur, the Day of Atonement, and it says that the Priests is high enough on the Mount of Olives to look over the Eastern Gate. So this wall is relatively low, we see how high is enough. So you understand it would not prove or disprove where the Temple was because he is not looking through the gate he is looking over the gate. So we still have some uncertainty. What has been found is an excavation in the 1880's by a British explorer named Warren. He from here dug a well to get permission from the Turks and came to point up here and he came under the cemetery, and he found 46 feet out from this wall is another wall that then curves in here. He followed that wall and it shows that again that this wall was a part of a way of coming up here and then it is such a steep slope here, having another probably a lower gate there, he only excavated this little section here.

Dr. Reagan: So he drilled straight down and then he started going sideways.

Dr. Fleming: Laterally, yes.

Dr. Reagan: I still don't understand though, was this the ancient wall?

Dr. Fleming: It seems to be a retaining wall outside the Temple Wall.

Dr. Reagan: Okay.

Dr. Fleming: Because it was so steep.

Dr. Reagan: Alright, now what does all of this have to do with the location of the Temple?

Dr. Fleming: Good idea. And to do with the way you get to the Temple. The Mount of Olives was due east of Jerusalem. Messiah would come from the east, would plant His feet on the Mount of Olives, right, and enter Jerusalem. Jesus enters Jerusalem from the east on Palm Sunday. Jews wanted to be buried on the eastside of the city to be near where Messiah would come. So many wondered, "Did Jesus enter through the Eastern Gate." The New Testament doesn't help us, it says at that point, he descended the Mount of Olives and entered the Temple. There were 2 main entrances to the Temple in the southern wall called the Hulda Gates, and...

Dr. Reagan: HULDA, Hulda.

Dr. Fleming: DA sometimes DAH. The main written sources say they served as the main entrance. The Eastern Gate was used for ceremonial purposes on the Day of Atonement and for the red heifer ceremony the Cause Way of the Red Heifer Ceremony.

Dr. Reagan: Again I am still going to press you on this. What does this have to do with have to do with the location of the Temple? I mean was the Eastern Gate in front of the Temple or not?

Dr. Fleming: We don't know.

Dr. Reagan: You don't know.

Dr. Fleming: We don't know. If it was the Temple may have been further north. But we can not know for sure.

Dr. Reagan: What is your best guess? Are you willing to make one or not?

Dr. Fleming: I think that it is very important for the Romans after they destroyed Jerusalem to show that the Roman god is greater than the Jewish God is for them to put the temple they built to honor Jupiter exactly on top of where the Jewish Temple was. And it was, then that temple was destroyed by the Christians later and then the site was left to ruin. But there is evidence that the Roman temple from 135 AD to the 4th Century AD would and some of the lines we see up here of the Temple Mount does seem to be over where the Dome of the Rock is.

Dr. Reagan: So your best guess at this point is that the Ancient Temple was located where the Dome of the Rock is located.

Dr. Fleming: Because ancient wars were not only wars between armies, they were wars between gods.

Dr. Reagan: Yes, that is true.

Dr. Fleming: And you've got to show that your god is greater than their god.

Dr. Reagan: But the problem we have here is that the Muslims really have control, it is under Israeli sovereignty but the Israeli's turned it over to them and when you go up there you have to go through Muslim guards.

Dr. Fleming: Yes.

Dr. Reagan: You have to obey Muslim rules.

Dr. Fleming: Yes.

Dr. Reagan: For example when you are walking around the temple mount I can't touch my wife's hand. I can't pull out a Bible and read, I can't pray because they will not tolerate that. So they will not tolerate archaeological excavations up there.

Dr. Fleming: Correct.

Dr. Reagan: So we can't dig to find out for sure where the Temple was located.

Dr. Fleming: Wouldn't it be great if there was that kind of tolerance that Jesus spoke about, speaking about Isaiah, "My house should be called a house of prayer, for all men."

Dr. Reagan: Let me ask you something else. Right here, about here, is a small cupola.

Dr. Fleming: Yes.

Dr. Reagan: A very small cupola, it is called the Dome of the Spirit.

Dr. Fleming: Yes.

Dr. Reagan: It has the only outcropping I think of the...

Dr. Fleming: Bedrock.

Dr. Reagan: ...bedrock, right there and it is smoothed off, many think that may have been the location of the Holy of Holies. What do you think it was?

Dr. Fleming: It is hard to say, there is bedrock of course exposed inside.

Dr. Reagan: Sure, yes.

Dr. Fleming: But here is the reason that I am cautious. When the Temple is described by Josephus he says, "It had courtyards on four sides." He says, "The Eastern Court was the largest, the Northern Court, the Southern Court was the next largest, the Northern Court the next, and the Western Court was so small it served no purpose." This is just so far North, it makes many wonder; I mean it still fits to for it to be the third largest court yard.

Dr. Reagan: Yes.

Dr. Fleming: But it just seems like it is so out of center to have it that much further north. Now Herod added southwest and north when he built the Temple courtyards. But in summary and I know people don't like that uncertainty; we have to have some caution here.

Dr. Reagan: Sure.

Dr. Fleming: Because it was, the Romans dug up the very foundation of the Temple, again to make a political and religious statement. In fact they were probably looting for the gold of the Temple that made the saying of Jesus literally true, that not 1 stone would be left standing on another.

Dr. Reagan: That's right.

Dr. Fleming: So that makes it hard for the archaeologist to be able to have stuff to look at 2,000 years later.

Dr. Reagan: Yes, now around this area there can be no excavations on this side because of the Muslim cemetery. In 1967 when the Israeli's regained this one of the first things they started doing was excavating the south end.

Dr. Fleming: Yes.

Dr. Reagan: And found remarkable things there. One of the most remarkable to me is the huge mikvah they found here.

Dr. Fleming: Yes.

Dr. Reagan: I mean massive thing. You know on the Day of Pentecost Peter, 3,000 people responded and he baptized them.

Dr. Fleming: There are 3 dozen baptisteries areas.

Dr. Reagan: I know.

Dr. Fleming: In that one building.

Dr. Reagan: I know they didn't march them down to the Jordan River; no he could have stepped right out here and done it, yeah.

Dr. Fleming: Sure, sure.

Dr. Reagan: On this side this is the famous what the American's call the Wailing Wall or the Western Wall. But only a portion of it is revealed and from here on you have houses that make it difficult to do any excavations, and also up here.

Dr. Fleming: Yes. So outside the Temple Mount there are things that unfortunately there have been Muslim excavations in a few places inside to do with pipes and stuff like that. But we found where their dump was, and all the debris from that dump is now being scientifically analyzed by Gabi Barkai an Israeli Archaeologist.

Dr. Reagan: I have another question for you and that is in many, many, many drawings I have seen of the Ancient Temple at the time of Jesus, they show a bridge going across the Kidron Valley from the Mount of Olives to the Eastern Gate. Is there any archaeological evidence that such a bridge existed?

Dr. Fleming: No. But the written sources say that the priest goes across the causeway of the scapegoat, and the causeway of the Red Heifer. That is because the Mount of Olives has tombs and the priest does not want to be defiled going on a tomb. But this is a wooden boardwalk.

Dr. Reagan: Okay.

Dr. Fleming: Temporarily constructed for the tomb.

Dr. Reagan: Not a formal bridge.

Dr. Fleming: And so those who made those maps don't notice the detail that says that it was temporarily constructed, and then taken down.

Dr. Reagan: Okay, now all of this brings us to one of the great mysteries of Bible history, and that is what in the world ever happened to the Ark of the Covenant which relates of course to the Temple and everything else. So in just a moment we are going to discuss that.

Dr. Fleming: Good.

Part 3

Dr. Reagan: Welcome back to our interview of Dr. James Fleming who is one of the foremost teachers of Biblical Archaeology.

Nathan Jones: Dr. Fleming your discussion on the location or probable location of the Temple made me think to ask, where is the Ark of the Covenant that is supposed to be in that Temple?

Dr. Fleming: This is a very curious question that so many people have. It is interesting we do know from the Bible in 2 Kings 25 that Nebuchadnezzar burned the House of the Lord, the Kings House every great man's house he burned with fire. That is our last specific mention of the Ark. And you might guess some people wondered, "Did the Babylonians destroy it?" What is clear is when Ezra returns and rebuilds the Temple in the early 500's and later Nehemiah the walls and things in the 400's and later Herod the Great rebuilds it. No Jewish source speaks of the Ark, in fact the opposite. When the Temple in the time of Jesus is described in Jewish memory it says, "The Holy of Holies was an empty room. There was a stone that stood 3 fingers high above the rest of the floor where the ancient Ark of the Covenant used to be." But behind the veil the curtain was an empty room. Jews were wise enough to, and they probably learned from the prophets to know that God is not in a box, that the Lord could still be in their worship and their hearts. I'd rather have mercy than sacrifice the Lord said. But there is no mention of it, and when the Roman's destroyed the Temple in 70 AD what do they show back in Rome on the victory march it is the Temple lamp stand, the trumpets, things like that.

Dr. Reagan: A menorah, yes.

Dr. Fleming: Yeah, no Ark.

Dr. Reagan: Let me just play with that for a moment. I have read a lot of Jewish sources who truly believe that the Ark is somewhere beneath the Temple Mount. And their argument is this, that it would have been unthinkable to have the precious Holy of Holies in the Ark of the Covenant there without some sort of chamber that you could take it to and hide it in the event of a siege of Jerusalem. And so they argue that surely somewhere underground there, there was a special chamber where they put it. And they argue that the reason it was always empty during the time of the second Temple was because they were under Roman occupation and they did not think it was appropriate to bring it out and put it in the Holy of Holies as long as they were under occupation. Would do you have to say about that?

Dr. Fleming: Interesting theories, none of them mentioned at the time of the Roman period these are later looking back. There was certainly was time, it was several weeks from when the Roman's broke in through the northern wall of Jerusalem until when they set the Temple platform on fire they could have secreted it away. On the other hand we are told that they thought because it was a Holy Temple that God would protect them. And they even brought the women and children just before it was all set on fire up to the Temple Mount. So they may have felt that maybe it would not fall that God would somehow send a miracle and the city would survive.

Dr. Reagan: There are some who think the Ark was raptured and taken to Heaven and that John saw it in Revelation when he saw an Ark in Heaven.

Dr. Fleming: Yes.

Dr. Reagan: What about that?

Dr. Fleming: Again it is one of those things, is that a theological statement or is it man shooting? You know? Or is it an historical event?

Nathan Jones: What about Ethiopia? Last year they were going to have this big announcement they were going to finally show the Ark that is sitting in some church in Ethiopia. Have you been to that church?

Dr. Fleming: Yes, I have. It is at a city named Axum. Every year at the Feast of the Ark of the Covenant it is on a procession from the Miriam Church out to a water source and they say you can look at the reflection of the Ark in the water but you can't look at the Ark. But there is a garment over it. Now every Ethiopian Orthodox Church has a replica of the Ark in their own

sanctuary of their church. The replica looks nothing like the Biblical drawings of it and so I would be very skeptical and other reasons for it has to do with the Queen of Sheba and Solomon and....

Dr. Reagan: To me that is just absolutely absurd that the son born between Solomon and the Queen of Sheba went back and got the Ark and took it down there.

Dr. Fleming: That Solomon gave him as a gift.

Nathan Jones: Yeah.

Dr. Reagan: I think that it is just crazy. Well let me ask you about this one; in Jeremiah 3:16 it says, "In those days when you are multiplied increase in the land declares the Lord, they shall say no more the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord and it shall not come to mind nor shall they remember it, nor shall they miss it, nor shall it be made again." Does that have to do with the Millennial Reign, or does it have to do with the Temple during the Tribulation? Or what does it have to do with?

Dr. Fleming: Yeah, it seems like for the prophets that they are worried about people who put too much emphasis on a particular structure or cultic thing and for them of course it was supposed to be the Lord really wanted mercy and maybe this was to get some people putting too much emphasize.

Dr. Reagan: What about the book of Maccabees, it says, that Jeremiah took the Ark to what modern day Jordan and hid it there in Mount Nebo.

Dr. Fleming: It doesn't specifically say that in the Maccabees but this is a view that is often mentioned. This was made some people look at Mount Nebo; there are 16 places people have guessed where it was.

Dr. Reagan: So the bottom line is we don't know what happened to the Ark of the Covenant.

Dr. Fleming: I hate to say it again, we can not me sure.

Dr. Reagan: Well Jim our time is up and I would like to ask to come back for just one more program. I know that is asking a lot of you, but we would like to get into some issues that are currently being debated in the whole field of Archaeology and get your opinion on it.

Dr. Fleming: Alright, I would be glad to.

Dr. Reagan: Okay, well folks that is our program for this week. Until next week the Lord willing this is Dave Reagan speaking for Lamb and Lion Ministries, saying, “Look up, be watchful, for our redemption is drawing near.”

End of Program