

# Lecture 1: Introduction

*Ralph D. Winter*

I remember years ago, traveling by taxi at about 40 or 50 miles in the state of Wahaka. And going from the state of Wahaka to a different state of San Christakos and the man who was driving was about 30 years old and we got to talking and in Mexico in those days it was very inexpensive; I paid about 4 dollars for the entire trip. And one of the things that will forever stick in my mind is he asked me, “tell me, which is closer to Mexico, Russia or the United States?” And it began to dawn on me, you know, not everyone in the world has seen a global map. Later on in Guatemala I’m sure many of the people there who have never been 12 miles from where they were born. And so, it is geographically true, but in another sense most people in the world even those who know all about the geography of the world, have really no idea of the sweep of history. They are burrowing away like a bird pecking at the trunk of a tree. But they don’t know about the other trees or the other woodpeckers. They don’t know they are in California even, they don’t know where they are or what they are doing. And most people are like that. So it’s very rare that anyone would even bring up the topic that we are facing tonight; because in this situation we are in a very very new field of study. Historians usually study some very narrow field of study. For example, Ruth Tucker was a specialist in civil war archives. So, when she went to write her book from Jerusalem to Irian Jaya, she had to do a lot of additional study completely out of her field of her PhD in History.

Just in general, historians shy away from interpretations. In fact, it’s almost a no-no in the world of professional historians for you to say that you think something might have happened. Your only goal is to say that this did happen. And what we really know is very small as to what we are surmising. And this is going to be true, especially tonight.

You can easily imagine an ant walking over a picture, and over a period of time seeing every portion of that picture, but never seeing the whole picture. Well, you

can imagine a person doing a videotape of all of human history, and then taking out little pieces here and there and then looking at them and not knowing the sequence of them. The average Sunday school student, for example, may often wonder whether King David came before Moses or Moses came before Isaiah. They are doing what I would call “episodic” study, they are studying episodes, and those episodes can often be quite meaningful and helpful, but It’s only when those episodes fit into a larger picture that the thrill begins to appear. I remember years ago teaching an adult Sunday school class and telling them that before we get through with this thing I want everyone in that group to be able to tell the whole bible story in 60 seconds. And they did. And it is possible. But very few people really have that perspective. They’ve studied the bible in pieces here and there, sort of like grabbing into a refrigerator there is no connection into those stories. Now, that’s really to bad, because the overall story is of impressive significance especially to Christians.

Now, in past history, the people who’ve really made the greatest use of an overall story have been the communists. One of they’re greatest attractions in past history it hasn’t been the Christians so much as the communists who have made a tremendous hit with their overall interpretation of history. In fact, many people have joined the communist movement for the sole reason, or for the main reason at least that, they know where history is going. And you join the communists, and then you know we’re your going. And that’s one of the great attractions of the communist tradition. And of course, that’s what of the greatest contributions of Karl Marx; that he had his eye fixed on the overall picture. And whether the communists were right or not, is irrelevant. They were thrilling people by their interpretation. Whether it was fictional or fanciful or whatever, didn’t make any difference. It meant it was an overall picture, and while most people don’t ever think about

such a thing, those who do get caught up into it. Now, one of the people who has thought about that and this book I have in my hands, called *Maps of Time* has a subtitle “An Introduction to Big History”. And this is written by a man named David Christian. An Australian who has taught in Universities in England, in the United States, and the book is published by the University of California at Berkeley. This is probably the first respected, substantial, book on Big History. And he starts with the Big Bang. Now, I suspect that one reason not many other people have tried to do this is only relatively recently in history has there been any really wide consensus about the fact that there was a beginning to the universe. In fact, there are still some hold outs. Actually, University of California San Diego a couple of professors who are actually married to each other, who are absolute holdouts they say there is no big bang, this is a steady state, it wanes and it waxes, and things like that, but it does not have a beginning and an ending.

Well, this book starts out with the Big Bang and then the next to last chapter is entitled, the acceleration of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The final chapter, which is another 20 page chapter, is futures. He has three sections to that chapter, the next 100 years, that’s the near future, then the middle future, which is like 1000 years, and then the distant future, which runs thousands and thousands and thousands of years. And it turns out things are really big when you get into those kind of numbers. For example, if you traveled in a spaceship at the speed of light, and all you wanted to do was go from the earth to the center of our galaxy, and we’re closer than halfway into the center, it would take you 30,000 years traveling at the speed of light, just to get to the center of the galaxy. And so you see, he is really rather pessimistic about intergalactic travel. And, it’s a really interesting thing. And of course he reflects the prevailing cosmological understanding of the astronomical profession. He’s of course, borrowing from astronomers what they currently think. But apparently, there will come a time when the sun will burn and expand, and gets so large that it will almost reach the earth, and then at that point, if anyone was still living on the earth, and the earth will have a temperature of 2,000 degrees Fahrenheit, the sun will almost block out the total sky. And, so of course eventually the sun at 2,000 degrees will boil all of the water and the earth will end up like the moon, and if anyone is going to survive

they will have to transmigrate to another planet farther out, and eventually the same thing will happen. So, the future really isn’t very brilliant. He does point out though that there is no future for this planet in terms of humanity unless somehow we can stop the fast rate of population growth. And he has lots of statistics on the effect of burning out of essential things on this planet. And of course, he is quite sure that we are not going to burn out, that we are going to attain the population growth rate he points out that in 1998 33 countries had already reached a 0% population growth rate. So, there is nothing impossible about reaching a 0 population growth rate. But, if we keep expanding at the rate we are, he quotes Ghandi, actually, way back in 1928 a very insightful statement, he says, “God forbid that India should ever take to industrialization after the manner of the west. If an entire nation of 300 million (now, this is the population of India in 1928) took to similar economic exploitation they would strip the entire world bare like locust.” And, if you go to India with 4 children, you will be embarrassed every day that you stay there, because 4 children is just unthinkable in terms of India, even though they don’t have the same draconian policies that China has. But here are the two largest countries in the world, that have already taken great measures.

Well, that’s just the kind of hazy future. This story however, obviously, runs from the Big Bang, the beginning of the universe, which is a rather new conviction. In fact, in the early days when people were talking about the “Big Bang”, or I should say the beginning of the universe, it was the scoffers who called it the Big Bang theory, that was a sneering name for it, and they were in part sneering because they thought this is just another way to smuggle religion into science. Well, now of course, practically everyone accepts the Big Bang theory, you know, they don’t say anything about that fact that it implies religious conviction. Now that the Big Bang theory is widely accepted, the whole idea that it is like a religious theory has dropped out of sight.

I must say, having commented about the end of things, that the beginning in terms of the Big Bang theory is just about as incredible as anything you could ever believe. The theory goes, according to this book, that within the first second the universe expanded out of almost nothing, a tiny little spec, to a size larger than our galaxy. Now, our galaxy is 100,000 lightyears across. And, recent studies have indicated that it may

be 3 times as large as we thought it was. However, if the universe expanded from almost nothing to the size of our galaxy in less than a second, that would be 3154 billion times faster than the speed of light. Now, I don't know about you, but I find it hard to believe that anything could go 3154 billion times as fast as light, which goes at 186,000 miles per second. So, you see, the scientists have conjured up some easy to believe theories, along with Darwinism and other things like that, that are very easy to believe of course.

Well, in any case, this is a very interesting subject because probably Christians have a bigger stake in an overall interpretation than anyone else. And it turns out today that many Christians are embarrassed by the fact that what they thought the bible believed may not really be true. John Calvin, a very intelligent man, and Martin Luther, another very very brilliant man, they both agreed that the bible clearly states that the sun goes around the earth. In fact, if you want to see that statement in print, let me read from this part of the Psalms which is what they referred to. Psalm 19, in language which is somewhat vague, says "In the heaven he pitched a tent for the son, which is like a bridegroom coming forth from his pavilion, like a champion rejoices to run his course, it rises at one end of the heavens and makes it circuit to the other, nothing is hidden from it's heat." Now, Calvin and Luther both said that proves that the sun goes around the earth. Later, when it became clear that really wasn't the case, and that maybe the bible really isn't saying that the bible is simply talking about what appears to every person every morning, the public assumption was, that the bible was wrong. Nobody said that Luther or Calvin misinterpreted the bible. That didn't occur to people. They just said well, the bible obviously is out of date and isn't true. So, we have to be very careful how we interpret the bible because we want to be fair to the bible. If the bible isn't saying something then let's not force it to say that.

For example, to the Jewish people in captivity in Babylon who wanted to get back to the land, this is kind of a pro-Zionism if you wish, the word of God came in Isaiah 49:6 it is a fairly trivial or secondary thing, it is a light thing, the NIV says it is a light thing, that I shall raise up the tribes of Jacob and restore the preserved of Israel, I want my salvation to go to the ends of the earth. And I preached on that verse for many years as a marvelous example of an Old Testament great com-

mission. Until I found out, that those people in those days didn't know there was a planet, and they were probably not referring to the planet, but they did use the earth to refer to the flat plane of the Fertile Crescent. And the end of that plain was the mountains of Iran, Afghanistan, Turkey, and that was the ends of the earth. All of the sudden it becomes clear, something I never realized the bible was really trying to say all the time. I had not been fair to the bible, the bible was really saying to these captives, I want my salvation to go to your captors. Now that's a bitter pill.

I'll never forget being in Pakistan one time and I found that the faculty of this seminary to whom I was speaking for 6 or 7 hours, they were getting more and more unhappy about my concern that the 97% population of Pakistan being Muslim were not in their sights. They were not concerned about those people, and I was. And finally one of the faculty members waved a finger in my face and said, "if you send missionaries to Pakistan to reach the Muslims we'll go to the government and get them thrown out of the country." And of course, the president of Pakistan today is the graduate of a Christian college, and probably they could do that, they could get someone thrown out of the country if they wanted to. But notice, if somebody said to them, look, I want you to be my salvation to your captors, which would be a very bitter pill. And, if the bible is saying that, why should we cover that up, by interpreting it to mean I want you to send missionaries to the ends of the earth. As much as I would like it to say that or to say someplace, in the biblical context that word, that phrase, didn't have that meaning. And it would not be fair to the bible if we forced it to mean what we would like it to mean.

So, let's take a look now briefly, at one of the passages of the New Testament that does in fact talk in expansive terms. Now I think for example that Paul the apostle who didn't know there was a planet in all probability wasn't necessarily talking in other than first century cosmological terms. But, he was announcing things that did indeed have significance for the entire earth. And I'm talking about Acts 26. This is the chapter where he comes before Agrippa and where Agrippa says tell me your story and he was struck down in the middle of the day by light and the voice from the heavens says rise, get up on your feet I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and a witness of what you have seen of me and what I will show

you. I will rescue you from your own people and from the gentiles. I am sending you to them to open their eyes to turn them from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God. Now, that's a theoretical statement. Using three metaphors that really say that same thing. But then, further on he says so King Agrippa I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, I preached that they should repent turn to God, and prove their repentance by their deeds. Now, this goes much further than the reformation emphasis about giving people a ticket to heaven.

Interestingly enough, evangelicals have gone further than the reformation, we can now assure people that they can get to heaven. The reformation could not assure people that they could get to heaven, they just gave them a method of hoping to get there. And up until 2 centuries later, there were lots of Christians who couldn't possibly accept Christ and get to heaven, there was no assurance of salvation because they were in the old reformation tradition and in that tradition you waited until God selected you. You hoped that God would save you, you read your bible you went to church, but there was no real assurance. In this particular case, it doesn't emphasize so much what you are going to get out of this but what you have to put into it.

Turning means repenting. When Paul said for example in Galatians, not I but Christ who lives within me, we are no longer to live for ourselves but under him who died for us and rose again, he was talking not about people doing bad things necessarily although that would be included, but he was talking about a totally new life. What did that mean? What did Paul understand that to mean? Obviously, we can understand more than he did, as to what God is up to. We've seen much much more. Think for example on the paths of people who only knew 12 miles or only knew 12 years or 20 years or 30 years. The average age in Luther's day was 26 years old. Now that doesn't mean that everyone dies at 26, that means that a whole lot of people died before 1 year old. And some people lived to be 60, 70, 80, not very many people of course. Right now in this country there are 75,000 people who are 100 years old or older. And that's a fairly new development. In any case, people who only knew a bit of time, obviously couldn't have extrapolated into all the different possibilities of what turning to God would mean. But obviously Paul interpreted all of human experience as the arena in which God's will was being unfolded and

fulfilled. And that everyone who follows Christ would be caught up in that larger picture in that larger vision.

But, two things that come out in this story that we usually overlook. Why did God have to say to him "I will rescue you from your people and from the gentiles." And why a little bit later on does he say "that is why the Jews seized me at the temple and tried to kill me." What is the "that"? Why would a man who wants to rescue people from blindness darkness and captivity be set upon. Well, for one thing, the first recorded sermon of Jesus Christ led to an attempt on his death. Remember, Luke 4. He was saying things that everyone was very happy about, they said well here is this young man who is doing real well up there and they were poking each other saying ain't he great, and then all of the sudden he talked about some gentiles on whom God smiled. And then the people became very alert to what he was going to say next. And then he goes on to say one more thing about another group of gentiles for whom the grace of God extended, and that did it. They surged out and seized and grabbed a hold of him and took him to throw him off the hill. Now why was that? It was competitive. They're own security, they're own theology was being tested by this unique insight which of course was there in the bible all along.

Or take the first recorded sermon of the apostle Paul. There were two Antioch's, the place he was sent from and his new Antioch where he went for the first recorded sermon in the book of Acts. And he was invited to speak for two Sabbaths. Which was a courteous thing for a person with rabbinical training which he had. But they had no idea what he was going to say apparently, because the very first time he spoke the elders who usually sat in the front rows became more and more disturbed, he seemed to be talking to the people in the back rows. The people who were the gentiles, who were just sitting in. They were not really proselytes they hadn't converted over to Judaism as a culture. But they were now very interested in the bible that was being read every Sabbath and they may have been there for years. They were called God-fearers or devout persons. And Paul was seemingly talking to them and releasing them from their assumption that they would have to become Jews to be acceptable to God. And these Jews in the front row were really furious. And of course, when Paul came back the second Sabbath they were prepared for him. It was common for elders to stand up and reinforce a point or give an illustration,

you might say assist the person who was speaking. This was a courteous and typical thing in a synagogue. But in this case they contradicted him. They stood up and they defied him and hassled him. And at one point he picked up his NIV bible and just walked right straight out through down the red carpet and the whole crew in the back rows went with him. And then you see this was a serious problem for these people. Now what did they do? It says the Jews, followed him and tried to kill him. They thought they killed him. They dragged him outside the city, because that is the law abiding thing to do. These were upright people, these were Enron Sunday school teachers you know. But of course, they failed, because stoning is not a very decisive way to kill people. You almost always stun them, and they look like they're dead but they may not be dead. In any case, whether he was raised from the dead or wasn't quite killed, we have to give them credit for trying. But obviously, when the will of God impinges on the will of man, sparks fly. And what Paul is talking about is not going through a little ritual of theology and getting an assurance of heaven and getting a ticket put in your pocket. He is talking about a totally new way of life. Which has to do with the whole sweep of history.

But, the contrary element is very important here. Because it isn't just in this particular passage we find a contrary element to the will of God. He was of course, under pressure and difficulty and danger many times and was one of the most beat up missionaries that ever lived. But, think for example of the Cross. I really am confused and stunned by all of these books that are so happy that the Cross appeared and the blood of Christ was shed and we've got what we need now. What else does the Cross mean? It means that there is a very cruel and powerful force in this world contrary to God. It means many things, John Piper my good friend with whom I had lunch a few weeks ago, wrote a whole book with 50 chapters talking about the purposes of God revealed in the Cross. And on the back cover of the book he says "Now, I'm not speaking about causes, I'm talking about purposes of God." So, when I ate lunch with him, I said, "John, don't you think the Cross had a very significant meaning in revealing the power and the cruelty of our enemy?" I think it does mean that. But it wasn't just the Cross. Even if you go back into Genesis 12, where we take so happily that verse, I will bless you and you will be a blessing to all peoples of the world. The word blessing doesn't mean blessing

in the modern English sense, it means I will re-inherit you, like the blessing Jacob got instead of Esau. It wasn't a box of chocolates or a piece of land, it was a responsibility, a permanent responsibility. Well, in any case, right in those verses, those who mistreat you, I will curse. Why would they mistreat them? There is this contrary principle.

But you go further back to Noah. In his day, it says in the King James, everyone was only doing evil continually. There was evil in the world, so much so, that Noah was practically the only person who God could select. Go back further and you get to Lamech, who if somebody was going to avenge somebody else 7 times, he would avenge them 77 times. Or Cain. Where did that evil come from? And then of course you see the serpent in the garden of Eden. In the garden of Eden, there has been this often referred to, cultural mandate of man being created to take care of the animals. But notice, when that happened there was no evil for them to contend with. The animals were not even carnivorous animals. And even the human beings were not carnivorous. There was no emergency or problem. And that cultural mandate to take care of the animals, after the fall of Adam, was obviously drastically modified. Why would it even continue unchanged?

Now, you would think there would be some sort of a military mandate. And a military mandate, if you want to use the phrase, includes the cultural mandate. In a war, like I was in the second World War, that war engulfed every single person in the United States. Not just the service men. Every single person had to justify what they were doing. If you went on a Sunday drive with no purpose other than family happiness, you could be fined 50 dollars. You had to justify every drop of gasoline you used. You couldn't buy nylon stockings they were used for parachute chords, and on and on and on. The entire citizenry is engulfed in a war. And all of the functions of the cultural mandate still go on, except the trivialities. I don't know that the cultural mandate in the first chapter of genesis is supposed to refer to trivialities anyway. In addition to those there are other strident demands upon the populace that take some thousands and thousands to their death. And many more into casualties. And you don't have to write a book about the peculiar nature of suffering during a war, and so why is it that our theologians are writing books about suffering, because we don't think there is a war? We don't realize there is a war. There is a continuing constant evil power to fight against.

And so, it is very significant that in the first chapter of Genesis, again and again it says and it was good. It was good. This kind of creation in Genesis isn't dinosaurs which you couldn't call good. It isn't the tremendously violent clash of all forms of life which we witnessed in the bones we've been digging up for the last 200 years. In 1812 they first dug up the bones of a very large and vicious crocodile like creature that they could easily see had no comparison to anything alive right now. In fact, since then to now they now dug up 1,000 other kinds of animal life which is no longer in existence on this earth. In other words, the diversity of animal life right now, is only 1 thousandth of the diversity of all those bones that have been dug up. And so those bones don't really fit into chapter one of Genesis. And the question that we are going to be taking up very seriously in the next lesson is the question of whether Genesis is supposed to be describing those bones or not. And this is a very intriguing question because all of my life I have been trying to understand the bible better. And one of

the constant things that has happened, not every day but certainly every year, is there is this verse or this verse or this, I thought it meant this but it really meant that, and I have had to give up something that was maybe very precious, like the great commission in Isaiah 46. I gave it up. And now I know that verse means something very much more ominous and serious than the great commission as serious as that is. And so, this larger story brings into focus many of the smaller elements in the story and I hope we won't just be episodic in the approach of this whole story and that maybe we can get some fairly good ideas about what the overall story means.

Now, believe me, we're not going to come to absolute conclusions. I at least don't have some absolute conclusions about most of these things, I'm simply trying my best to figure them out. And I hope that you'll be able to help me do that. But in any case this is an overall sort of preview of coming attractions in this course. Thank you very much.