

Evolution and Origins

By Mike Keas

Pre-Session Assignments

One week before the session, participants will take the following assignments.

Assignment One

Read today's lesson. Compare the Discovery Institute's answers to frequently asked questions about intelligent design (ID) at www.discovery.org/id/faqs with criticisms of ID at websites such as Wikipedia. Prepare to share your answers to the following questions: What are the primary differences in opinion about ID? How might Christians appreciate the theistic (God exists) implications of ID, even though ID is based on scientific evidence rather than biblical evidence?

Assignment Two

Read today's lesson to understand the weakness of the evolutionary argument that most of the DNA in humans and other organisms is junk. Prepare to share your answers to the following questions: How does the fall of Adam and Eve into sin (see Genesis 3, especially vv. 17–23) help explain why a small percentage of human DNA does not function properly (i.e., it is useless or causes birth defects)? How does biblical teaching about creation imply that Adam and Eve would have been created initially with no defective or junk DNA?

Assignment Three

Read today's lesson and Genesis 1:26–31 in order to compare biblical teaching about the creation of humanity with the view of atheists such as Richard Dawkins. Prepare to share your answers to the following question: What are the differences and why are they important?

Scripture to Memorize

Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, after Our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." Genesis 1:26

Session Goal

Consistent with God's Word and in the power of the Holy Spirit—by the end of this session, disciples will understand some of the discredited claims of unguided evolution as well as the relationship between biblical teaching on creation and scientific evidence regarding the genetic "book of life" (DNA).

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It's in the Book

30 minutes

Real-Life Scenario

Imagine your friend announces that science proves there's no God. "We should follow unbiased scientists like Richard Dawkins to reach the conclusion of atheism," your friend insists. How would you respond?

What Is in the Genetic "Book of Life," and How Did It Originate?

Celebrity atheist and biologist Richard Dawkins defines *biology* as "the study of complicated things that give the appearance of having been designed for a purpose." The appearance of design and purpose is only an illusion, he argues, because life evolved by accidental mutations and natural selection (sometimes called "survival of the fittest"). In the 2008 film *Expelled: No Intelligence Allowed*, Dawkins says that no one knows how life originated. At the same time, he believes mutations changed the genetic molecules RNA and DNA in early life forms and that humans evolved without a creator.

The total DNA of a species (its genome) could be called its genetic "book of life." That DNA stores much of the information that makes an organism possible. Atheists and Christians disagree over how that information originated.

As a young scientist, Dawkins and others in the 1970s began to argue that most DNA is junk. Unguided evolution would have generated much more useless DNA than functional DNA, they reasoned. In his 1976 book *The Selfish Gene*, Dawkins claimed that most of DNA is "at best a harmless but useless passenger, hitching a ride in the survival machines [organisms] created by the other DNA."

Dawkins repeated this explanation in his 2009 book *The Greatest Show on Earth*, including the claim that "pseudogenes" (a kind of junk DNA) were only useful for "embarrassing creationists." Although scientists already were discovering some function for alleged junk DNA during Dawkins's early career, functional DNA discoveries have increased rapidly in recent days.

Advocates of an alternative scientific theory known as intelligent design (ID) have been arguing since the 1990s that we would discover biological function for the vast majority of DNA. They also argue that a small percentage of junk DNA would likely exist today due to mutations that damaged original, "junkless" genomes. Before we study how ID scientists anticipated the demise of junk DNA better than most evolutionary opponents of ID, we need to define ID theory.

"The theory of intelligent design holds that certain features of the universe and of living things are best explained by an intelligent cause, not an undirected process such as natural selection." That is how Discovery Institute, a leading ID organization, defines ID. If you do a web search for "intelligent design," note how many websites do not evaluate this scientific theory fairly. They often dismiss ID as merely a religious idea.

Clearly ID has religious implications (it is friendly to a belief in God), but so does evolution by unguided mutations (it is unfriendly to a belief in God). Whether you think the universe is billions of years old or just thousands of years old (conservative Christians hold either view), the evidence for the intelligent design of the universe and life gives us scientific reasons for belief in a Maker of all things, including DNA.

Recent scientific evidence shows “junk DNA” is mostly a myth. The primary results of a large, international research project called ENCODE (which stands for “encyclopedia of DNA elements”) were reported in September 2012. “These data enabled us to assign biochemical functions for 80% of the genome,” said a leading ENCODE spokesperson. Many ENCODE scientists expect this figure to increase. Although some scientists still debate whether these biochemical functions typically support life-critical functions, the latest research usually suggests they do.

Dawkins first publicly gave up the junk DNA argument in a televised debate with a Jewish rabbi. The rabbi confronted him with the new ENCODE data that had just been announced the week before. That new data meant Dawkins did not have scientific support for his junk DNA argument. Surprisingly, Dawkins would not acknowledge this contradiction. He just shifted perspectives and said he was not surprised that new research demonstrated that most so-called junk DNA actually had biological function. “It’s exactly what a Darwinist would hope for,” he claimed.

Discussion Questions

What popular myth about DNA did Dawkins promote most of his professional life? What can we learn from Dawkins’s 2012 reversal of opinion on junk DNA? Is he likely open to recognizing scientific evidence that seriously challenges Darwinism (and supports intelligent design)? Why?

Assignment One Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment One** during the week can now share a comparison of the Discovery Institute’s treatment of intelligent design with criticisms at websites such as Wikipedia.

Discussion Questions

What are the main differences in opinion about intelligent design? How might Christians appreciate the theistic (God exists) implications of ID, even though ID is based on scientific evidence rather than biblical evidence? How have ID predictions performed much better than Darwinian predictions about the alleged vastness of junk DNA?

Assignment Two Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment Two** during the week can now share answers to these questions: How does the fall of Adam and Eve into sin help explain why there is a small percentage of human DNA that does not function properly (it is useless or causes birth defects)? How does the Bible imply that Adam and Eve had no junk DNA originally?

Assignment Three Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment Three** during the week can now compare biblical teaching about the creation of humanity with the view of atheists such as Richard Dawkins. They also can share why the differences in their views are important.

Heart and Hands

8 minutes

Read again the **Real-Life Scenario** near the beginning of the lesson. Consider whether your answers have changed during the session.

Be silent for two or three minutes. Thank Jesus for His sacrifice and for the gospel. Adore Him for His glorious reign on the throne of heaven. Then ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you:

1. A way the Scriptures you studied today will change your heart for the glory of Christ.
2. Or a way those Scriptures will lead you to stop doing something for the glory of Christ.
3. Or a way those Scriptures will lead you to do something for the glory of Christ.

Write what the Spirit reveals to you below, and then be ready to share what you have written with the group.

Since Last Week

5 minutes

Give the group this update: "In our last session I made a commitment to . . . I want to let you know how that turned out. On that same issue I think the Holy Spirit now is leading me to . . ."

Grace-Filled Accountability

5 minutes

Disciples can agree on a way to hold one another accountable. Confessing faults with other disciples allows them to offer grace, insights, and encouragement. Even more important is confession to Christ, the source of true forgiveness and cleansing.

Planning for Evangelism, Missions, and Service

5 minutes

Groups of disciples always are making preparations for evangelism, missions, and service. Use these minutes to work on the next plan.

Prayer

7 minutes

Every disciple will pray aloud, offering praise to Jesus, thanking Him specifically for His gracious acts, making heartfelt confession, committing to actions flowing from the Bible study, praying toward evangelism locally and globally, and interceding for others as prompted by the Holy Spirit.

At Home: Nail It Down

Summarize what you have learned about the genetic “book of life” (DNA) in relationship to:

1. Failed Darwinian evolutionary predictions (especially during 1972–2012) that most DNA is junk.
2. The scientific theory of intelligent design, that successfully *predicted what* about DNA?
3. Biblical teaching about creation and the fall, that *implies what* about human DNA?

What questions about cosmic and biological origins would you like to study further? Hint: Browse web pages associated with the author of this lesson (see author profile) and ask for advice from your teachers, pastors, peers and parents.

Follow up Question

Would you like me to assist you with getting additional resources that will help you understand the scientific evidence for intelligent design and the scientific evidence against unguided evolution?

Hint: Browse the web pages associated with the author of this lesson (see author profile).

The Making Disciples curriculum is a gift from Southwestern Seminary to those who, for the glory of the Father and in the power of the Spirit, will spend a lifetime embracing the full supremacy of the Son, responding to His kingly reign in all of life, inviting Christ to live His life through them, and joining Him in making disciples among all peoples.