

INVESTIGATING ORIGINS

By Stephen Caesar
Associates for Biblical Research

“The Human Race: A Young Species?”

A recent series of genetic studies has revealed tantalizing hints of the origin of the human species. What’s more, these new discoveries would seem to lend support to the ancient history of the human race as outlined by the Book of Genesis.

Thanks to these and earlier studies of human genetics, scientists now know that the human race had a single point of origin and then spread out from there. One of the most recent of these studies was completed in December 2007, when a group of anthropologists and geneticists examined 3.9 million DNA sequences from 270 people belonging to four human populations around the globe. According to Gregory Cochran of the University of Utah, a member of the team, the study indicates that genetic variation among humans increased rapidly as they spread out from their point of origin and became agriculturalists (Biello 2007: 30).

Another discovery made by this spate of recent studies is that the human race as we know it is much younger than scientists had previously postulated. Geneticist Noah Rosenberg of the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor, who participated in a comprehensive study of human genetic variation published in the February 2008 issue of the prestigious journal *Nature*, concluded from his studies: “We are a young species. Different human populations have not been separated for long enough periods of time to develop their own new alleles [different forms of the same genes]” (Ibid.). After quoting Prof. Rosenberg, the June 2008 issue of *Scientific American* reported: “Many geneticists therefore express doubt that genes have evolved very much in the relatively short span of human existence in all parts of the planet” (Ibid.).

There is another fact to be gleaned from these new discoveries, one that lends plausibility to the Genesis scenario of a sudden choking off of almost the entire human species, to be followed by a worldwide expansion. *Scientific American* reported:

“Instead of [human] evolution working on a relatively small number of genes to actively promote functional adaptations—a process known as positive selection—the alternative is a demographic factor, which is a bottleneck,” explains geneticist Marcus Feldman of Stanford University. A bottleneck describes the rise of a new population from a few individuals. Feldman participated in a study of DNA samples from 938 people in 51 different populations, finding evidence for the alternative explanation in declining DNA sequence (haplotype) variation with increasing distance from Africa. The work appeared in [the journal] *Science* in February [2008]” (Ibid. 31).

A relatively young human species, a single point of origin, a sudden reduction of the human population to a small number of individuals, followed by a spreading out these individuals from their point of origin to become agriculturalists all across the globe—all these scenarios reflect the basic outline of the early history of the human race as described in the Book of Genesis

Reference:

Biello, D. 2008. “Need for Speed?” *Scientific American* 298, no. 6.

Stephen Caesar holds his master’s degree in anthropology/archaeology from Harvard. He is a staff member at Associates for Biblical Research.

