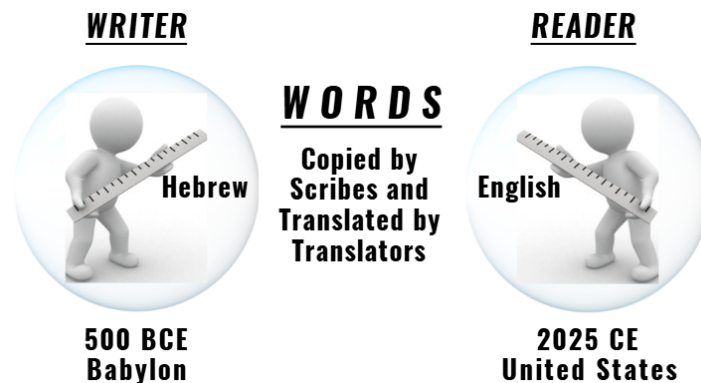


## Getting into the BHC Exploring Mindset

Always be on guard for “**ethnocentrism**.” It comes from two Greek words: “*ethnos*” (“**nation**”) and “*kentron*” (“**center**”). It means “*people believe their culture is central to the universe.*” It is a tendency to use our culture -- *values, ideas, and rules* — as **a starting point for thinking about and judging other people**. “It is a tendency to believe that our ways are right and those without our ways are less right. This tendency has been described as “each person lives in his or her own “**Bubble of Rightness**.”



Ethnocentrism is found in two rulers above:

- “**My society or group is right.**”
- “**My culture and institutions are right as well.**”<sup>1</sup>

The **Rulers** in the graphic represent **Ethnocentric Standards** people use to measure other people. This isn’t a problem as long as people have the same rulers, but when it comes to translating or reading the words of the Bible – *being ethnocentric is a deadly sin!* In order to prevent this, **translators and readers of English translations “must get into the ancient mindset first.”** If I do not do this first, my mind will use my ruler to judge the translator’s words.

My job as a translator is to help you “**see the world through the writer’s Bubble of Rightness**.” It is not to judge the Writer’s Ruler. I realized I needed to provide you with more scholarly information to help you understand. “*Getting into the ancient mindset*” begins with having Sources of information that are committed to following the **Laws of**

<sup>1</sup> *Ten Questions: A Sociological Perspective* by Joel M. Charon © 2013 Wadsworth, Cengage Learning; Wadsworth, Belmont, CA; p. 134-135.

Language and have been trained to work with the languages the ancient manuscripts of books the Bible. **How Words Work** introduces the first **Law of Language**. The graphic on the previous page reflects this model. Our “#1” goal is to **understand the Writer’s Ruler**:

*The writer’s culture, time period, place,  
and personal experiences.*

**How Words Work**  
***A word consists of symbols with  
an attached bundle of  
associations which are a  
product of the Source’s culture,  
historical time period,  
geographical location, and  
personal experiences.***

Our second goal is to “**avoid ethnocentrism**.”

*Do not use “**your Ruler**” to “**interpret the writer’s words!**”*

### **The Origin of Our Rulers**

After the end of World War II, two groups of scientists made discoveries that would ultimately combine and make possible a completely new understanding of humans.

- **Francis Crick**<sup>2</sup> and **James Watson**<sup>3</sup> deciphered the double-helical structure of **DNA**.<sup>4</sup>
- **Alan Turing** is widely considered to be the father of **theoretical computer science**.<sup>5</sup>

DNA and theoretical computer science made the **Human Genome Project** possible. It was formally founded in 1990 by the US Department of Energy and the National Institutes of Health. In addition to the United States, the international consortium comprised geneticists in the United Kingdom, France, Australia, China, and myriad other spontaneous relationships.<sup>6</sup> The first draft of the **human genome** (92% complete) was published in 2003.<sup>7</sup> The full 100% Human Genome was published in 2022.

<sup>2</sup> (1916–2004) an English molecular biologist, biophysicist, and neuroscientist [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Francis\\_Crick](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Francis_Crick)

<sup>3</sup> (born in 1928) is an American molecular biologist, geneticist, and zoologist [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James\\_Watson](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_Watson)

<sup>4</sup> Deoxyribonucleic acid is a polymer composed of two polynucleotide chains that coil around each other to form a double helix. The polymer carries genetic instructions for the development, functioning, growth and reproduction of all known organisms and many viruses. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/DNA>

<sup>5</sup> (1912–1954) was an English mathematician, computer scientist, logician, cryptanalyst, philosopher and theoretical biologist. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alan\\_Turing](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alan_Turing)

<sup>6</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human\\_Genome\\_Project](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human_Genome_Project)

<sup>7</sup> The Human Genome Project (HGP), which operated from 1990 to 2003, provided researchers with basic information about the sequences of the three billion chemical base pairs (i.e., adenine [A], thymine [T], guanine [G], and cytosine [C]) that make up human genomic DNA. The sequence of these polymers, their organization and structure, and the chemical modifications they contain not only provide the machinery needed to express the information held within the genome but also provide the genome with the capability to replicate, repair, package, and otherwise maintain itself. In addition, the

The Human Genome is the complete library of electro-chemical information, with instructions for creating a functioning human body. Human evolutionary genetics studies how one human genome differs from another human genome, the evolutionary past that gave rise to the human genome, and its current effects. Differences between genomes have anthropological, medical, historical and forensic implications and applications. Genetic data can provide important insights into human evolution. From comparisons of the human genome with the genomes of other species, it is clear that the genome of modern humans shares common ancestry with the genomes of all other animals on the planet and that the modern human genome arose between 150,000 and 300,000 years ago.<sup>8</sup> Plants and other creatures have DNA, too.<sup>9</sup>

Science has made it possible for humans to fly, breath underwater, move mountains, divert mighty rivers, see things and hear things no one ever saw before, etc. Science also produced the first atom bomb, which made it possible for humans to more efficiently kill each other, as well as destroy all life on earth. And as I wrote about above, science has our understanding of what we are and what we do.

### **Science Alone is Not Enough**

Francis S. Collins, M.D., Ph.D., is the former director of the National Institutes of Health (NIH).<sup>10</sup> He wrote a very informative book about the challenges he faced.

When I was invited to speak at the annual men's dinner at a highly regarded Protestant church just outside the District, I gladly accepted. It was an inspiring evening as prominent leaders, teachers, and blue-collar workers collectively let their hair down to talk earnestly about their faith, and to ask penetrating

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genome is essential for the survival of the human organism; without it no cell or tissue could live beyond a short period of time. <https://www.britannica.com/science/human-genome>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/science/human-genome>

<sup>9</sup> Compared to the 72,478 species of vertebrates, the sheer size of the green plant clade, especially the angiosperms with ~370,000 species, represents a huge challenge for genome sequencing as well as exciting opportunities for genome biologists. Over 70% of all species of flowering plants have not been sequenced for any DNA region, let alone a complete genome. Moreover, given their enormous habitat diversity and often remote, localized distributions, many plant species can only be sampled readily from herbarium specimens, limiting both the quantity and quality of DNA for gene and genome sequencing. <https://www.pnas.org/doi/10.1073/pnas.2115640118#sec-1>

<sup>10</sup> As the longest serving director of NIH — spanning 12 years and three presidencies — he oversaw the work of the largest supporter of biomedical research in the world, from basic to clinical research. Dr. Collins is a physician-geneticist noted for his landmark discoveries of disease genes and his leadership of the international Human Genome Project, which culminated in April 2003 with the completion of a finished sequence of the human DNA instruction book. He served as director of the National Human Genome Research Institute at the NIH from 1993-2008. <https://www.genome.gov/staff/Francis-S-Collins-MD-PhD>

questions about how science and faith can contradict or reinforce each other. For a good hour of discourse, goodwill filled the room.

And then one church member asked the senior pastor whether he believed that the first chapter of Genesis was a literal, step-by-step, day-by-day description of the origins of the earth and of humankind. In an instant, brows furrowed and jaws tightened. Harmony retreated to the far corners of the room. The pastor's carefully worded response, worthy of the most deft politician, managed utterly to avoid answering the question. Most of the men looked relieved that a confrontation had been avoided, but the spell was broken.<sup>11</sup>

A few months later I spoke to a national gathering of Christian physicians, explaining how I had found great joy in being both a scientist studying the genome and a follower of Christ. Warm smiles abounded; there was even an occasional "Amen." But then I mentioned how overwhelming the scientific evidence for evolution is, and suggested that in my view evolution might have been God's elegant plan for creating humankind. The warmth left the room. So did some of the attendees, literally walking out, shaking their heads in dismay.

What's going on here? <sup>12</sup>

. . . . A long and tortuous path through chemistry' physics, and medicine, I was finally encountering that inspiring field of human endeavor I had been longing to find—one that could combine my love of science and mathematics with a desire to help others—the discipline of medical genetics. **At the same time, I had reached the conclusion that faith in God was much more compelling than the atheism I had previously embraced**, and I was beginning for the first time in my life to perceive some of the eternal truths of the Bible.<sup>13</sup>

I hesitate, however, to advocate very strongly for faith-based bioethics. The obvious danger is the historical record that believers can and will sometimes utilize their faith in a way never intended by God, and to move from loving concern to self-righteousness, demagoguery and extremism.

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<sup>11</sup> *The Language of God: A Scientist Presents Evidence For Belief* by Francis S. Collins © 2006; Free Press, New York, NY; p. 145.

<sup>12</sup> *The Language of God*; p. 146.

<sup>13</sup> *The Language of God*; p. 147.

No doubt those who conducted the Inquisition thought themselves to be carrying out a highly ethical activity, as did those who executed witches in Salem, Massachusetts. In our time, Islamic suicide bombers and assassins of abortion-clinic doctors no doubt are also convinced of their moral righteousness. As we face challenging dilemmas wrought by science in the future, **let us bring every right and noble tradition of the world, tried and proven true through the centuries, to the table. But let us not imagine that every individual interpretation of those great truths will be honorable.**<sup>14</sup>

**Neil deGrasse Tyson** (born 1958) is an American astrophysicist, author, and science communicator. Since 1996, he has been the director of the Hayden Planetarium at the Rose Center for Earth and Space in New York City. The center is part of the American Museum of Natural History, where Tyson founded the Department of Astrophysics in 1997.<sup>15</sup>

**From what I have seen and encountered, Judaism manifests across a huge range of practices** — from emboldened Jews who enthusiastically eat bacon to the various sects of Orthodox Jews who, among other practices, maintain separate kitchen utensils for dairy and for meat. **As a scientist, I have much more experience with atheist Jews**. They do not view the Torah as the word of God. **They see it as a book of stories — not to be judged for their truth or falsehood, but repository of insights from which wisdom for livings one's life can be derived.**

Think about it — when we read fairy tales, we are not judging them for whether they are true or not.

Instead, we fold lessons derived from them into our world views. Not only this, **atheist Jews will commonly celebrate the high holidays with no less ritual than practicing Jews, right on down to leaving an open seat at the Seder table for Elijah**, and making sure the front door is unlocked, so he can just walk right in if he happens to show up.

**Why would an atheist Jew do this?** The answer is not hard. **Rituals and traditions account for some of the strongest binding forces among**

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<sup>14</sup> *The Language of God*; p. 271-272.

<sup>15</sup> Tyson studied at Harvard University, the University of Texas at Austin, and Columbia University. From 1991 to 1994, he was a postdoctoral research associate at Princeton University. In 1994, he joined the Hayden Planetarium as a staff scientist and the Princeton faculty as a visiting research scientist and lecturer. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neil\\_deGrasse\\_Tyson](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neil_deGrasse_Tyson)

peoples of the world. Attending Mass on Sundays for Catholics. Prayer five times per day for Muslims. Ancestor worship for the Animist religions. One can participate without judging whether the events that established the ritual have any literal truth at all. The participation creates a sense of community, which has almost always contributed value to civilization. It disrupts civilization only when people require that others share their particular rituals, with threat of force to achieve it.<sup>16</sup>

Dr. David Eagleman (born in 1971 in New Mexico) to Jewish parents Arthur and Cirel Egelman, a physician and a biology teacher, respectively. He earned his PhD in Neuroscience at Baylor College of Medicine in 1998, followed by a postdoctoral fellowship at the Salk Institute. As opposed to committing to strict atheism or to a particular religious position, Eagleman refers to himself as a **possibilian** -- *a philosophy that rejects both the diverse claims of traditional theism and the positions of certainty in strong atheism in favor of a middle, exploratory ground.*<sup>17</sup>

The genetics of the brain reveals a simple principle: **don't build inflexible hardware; build a system that adapts to the world around it** . . . it sets up a dynamic system that continually rewrites its circuitry to reflect the world around it and to optimize its efficacy within it . . . the magic of our brain lies not in its constituent elements but in the way those elements unceasingly reweave themselves to form a dynamic, electric, living fabric.

After just reading a few pages of this book, your brain has already changed: these symbols on the page have orchestrated millions of tiny changes across the vast seas of your neural connections, crafting you into someone just slightly different than you were at the beginning of the chapter.

Brains are not born into the world as blank slates. Instead, they arrive pre-equipped with expectations. Consider the birth of a baby chicken: moments after hatching, it wobbles around on its little legs and can clumsily run and dodge. In its environment, it simply doesn't have time to spend months or years learning how to move around.

Human infants, as well, come to the table with a good deal of pre-programming. Take the fact that **we come pre-equipped to absorb language**. Or that **babies will mimic an**

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<sup>16</sup> *Letters from an Astrophysicist* By Neil DeGrasse Tyson © 2019; W.W. Norton & Company, New York, NY; p. 215-216.

<sup>17</sup> He serves as the Chief Science Advisor for the Mind Science Foundation, and is the youngest member of the board of directors of the Long Now Foundation. Eagleman is a Guggenheim Fellow, a Fellow of the Institute for Ethics and Emerging Technologies, and a council member on the World Economic Forum's Global Agenda Council on Neuroscience & Behavior. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David\\_Eagleman](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Eagleman)



**adult** sticking out her tongue, a feat requiring a sophisticated ability to translate vision into motor action. Or that fibers from your eye don't need to learn how to find their targets deep in the brain; they simply follow molecular cues and hit their goal — every time. **For all this sort of hardwiring, we can thank our genes.**

But genetic hardwiring does not provide the whole story, especially for humans . . . **If DNA were the only thing that mattered, there would be no particular reason to build meaningful social programs to pour good experiences into children and protect them from bad experiences. But brains require the right kind of environment if they are to correctly develop.**

The answer pivots on a clever strategy implemented by the genome: **build incompletely and let world experience refine . . . The flexibility of the brain allows the events in your life to stitch themselves directly into the neural fabric.** It's a great trick on the part of Mother Nature, allowing the brain to learn languages, ride bicycles, and grasp quantum physics, all from the seeds of a small collection of genes. **Our DNA is not a blueprint; it is merely the first domino that kicks off the show.**

Because of **livewiring**, we are each a vessel of space and time. We drop into a particular spot on the world and vacuum in the details of that spot. **We become, in essence, a recording device for our moment in the world . . .** We generally go through life thinking there's me and there's the world. **But who you are emerges from everything you've interacted with: our environment, all of your experiences, your friends, your enemies, your culture, your belief system, your era — all of it.**

Although we value statements such as “he's his own man” or “she's an independent thinker,” **there is in fact no way to separate yourself from the rich context in which you're embedded.** There is no you without the external. **Your beliefs and dogmas and aspirations are shaped by it, inside and out, like a sculpture from a block of marble.**

*Thanks to livewiring, each of us is the world.*<sup>18</sup>

## **Rediscovering Our Biblical & American Roots**

**Professor Umberto Cassuto** (1883–1951) From 1922 to 1925, he was Chief Rabbi of Florence. In 1925 he became professor of Hebrew and literature at the University of

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<sup>18</sup> *Livewired: The Inside Story of the Ever-Changing Brain* by David Eagleman © 2020, Pantheon Books, New York, NY; pp. 10, 17, 19, 245.

Florence and then took the chair of Hebrew language at the University of Rome. When the 1938 anti-Semitic laws forced him from this position, he accepted an invitation to fill the chair of Biblical studies at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem in 1939, where he taught until his death in 1951.<sup>19</sup> Cassuto's career gave him access to some of the largest and most important libraries in the world.<sup>20</sup> Cassuto brought this knowledge with him to the Hebrew University in Jerusalem.

Being in Jerusalem gave Cassuto access to new sources of archaeological information and Hebrew documents. A subject that was being discussed around the world, was the clay tablets discovered in the ruins of the Palace and Library of Ashurbanipal (668–626 BCE). Some had been translated and that contain inscriptions relating to biblical stories.<sup>21</sup> Cassuto was one of the first scholars who understood the importance of these archaeological finds. **He published the first commentary on Genesis that included this information.** Below are his words.

The first chapters of the *Book of Genesis*, which form the subject of this commentary, deal with topics about which there were numerous sagas in the ancient East, both among the Israelites and among the Gentiles. Hence, it is not possible to understand the purpose of the Torah in these chapters without constant reference to the lore and learning, the doctrines and traditions, of the neighboring peoples, and of Israel itself, concerning these and I related matters. For this reason, I paid greater attention than earlier commentators to the literature of the nations of the ancient East and to all the archaeological data that might possibly throw light on the subject.

Seeing that this is the first commentary ever written on these sections of the Pentateuch in accordance with the principles that I have outlined above . . . it follows that **my exposition is, in its entirety, completely new and original.** I have taken constant care, however, **to avoid any hypotheses that are not well-founded.** I have **endeavored throughout not to forsake the firm basis of the facts; I did not**

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<sup>19</sup> Cassuto studied at the University of Florence (graduated in 1906), and the *Collegio Rabbinico* (ordained in 1908), where its principal Samuel Hirsch Margulies had a profound influence on him. After getting a degree and *Semicha*, he taught at both institutions. <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/cassuto-umberto>

<sup>20</sup> The National Central Library of Florence and the National Central Library of Rome. The library in Florence now has approximately 6,000,000 printed volumes, 2,689,672 pamphlets, 25,000 manuscripts, 4,000 book printed before 1501, 29,000 editions from the sixteenth century, and over 1,000,000 original copies. The Florence Library was founded in 1714, and by 1743, the law required that a copy of every work published in Florence, and later in all of central Italy, be sent to the library. In 1861, the Library of the Palace was acquired.

<sup>21</sup> Tablets described "The Great Flood," as well as fragmentary accounts of creation, a text on a war between good and evil 'gods', and a fall of man myth. A second expedition discovered accounts of the creation. By 1875 George Smith began publishing accounts of these discoveries in the *Daily Telegraph* on March 4, 1875.



bend the Bible to make it fit in with my theories, but rather fitted my theories to the Biblical text.<sup>22</sup>

**Nahum Mattathias Sarna** (1923– 2005) Between 1957 and 1965 Sarna served at the Jewish Theological Seminary as librarian (1957–63) and as associate professor of Bible.<sup>23</sup> Next he moved to Brandeis University as Golding Professor, and served in that chair from 1965 to 1985. Also, between 1966 and 1981 Sarna was a member of the committee that translated the last section of the *Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures* of the Jewish Publication Society (1982). **Sarna successfully employed both ancient Near Eastern material and the traditional Jewish sources to illuminate the Bible**. In a very active retirement, Sarna edited the JPS Torah Commentary, for which he wrote the volumes *Genesis* (1989), and *Exodus* (1991). Below are Sarna's words:

To successfully understand the biblical narrative, it has to be viewed against the background of the world out of which it grew and against which it reacted. **A comparison with Near Eastern cosmologies shows the degree of indebtedness of the Israelite version to literary precedent**.<sup>24</sup>

How to use this information “*Get into the Ancient Mindset*” before you read the First Story in the Bible.

1. Visualize Cassuto and Sarna sitting beside you.
2. Cassuto reminds you that “*the purpose of this section is to teach us that the whole world and all that it contains were created by the word of the One Elohim, according to His will, which operates without restraint.*”
3. Sarna reminds you that “*this story tells us something about the biblical concept of reality. It proclaims the essential goodness of life and assumes a universal moral order governing human society.*”
4. Tell them that you will avoid any hypotheses that are not well-founded; you will continually endeavor to be faithful to a firm basis of the facts; do not bend the words

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<sup>22</sup> *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis Part One: From Adam to Noah* by U. Cassuto © 1944; (reprinted 1986 by The Magnes Press), The Hebrew University, Jerusalem, Israel; pp. 1, 3.

<sup>23</sup> Sarna completed his Ph.D. at Dropsie College in Philadelphia and completed his Ph.D. (1955) under Cyrus Gordon. Sarna taught at Gratz College in Philadelphia (1951–57).

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/sarna-nahum-m>

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of the Bible to make them fit with your beliefs, but bend your beliefs to make them fit the beliefs of the authors behind the words of the Biblical text. ***BHC***