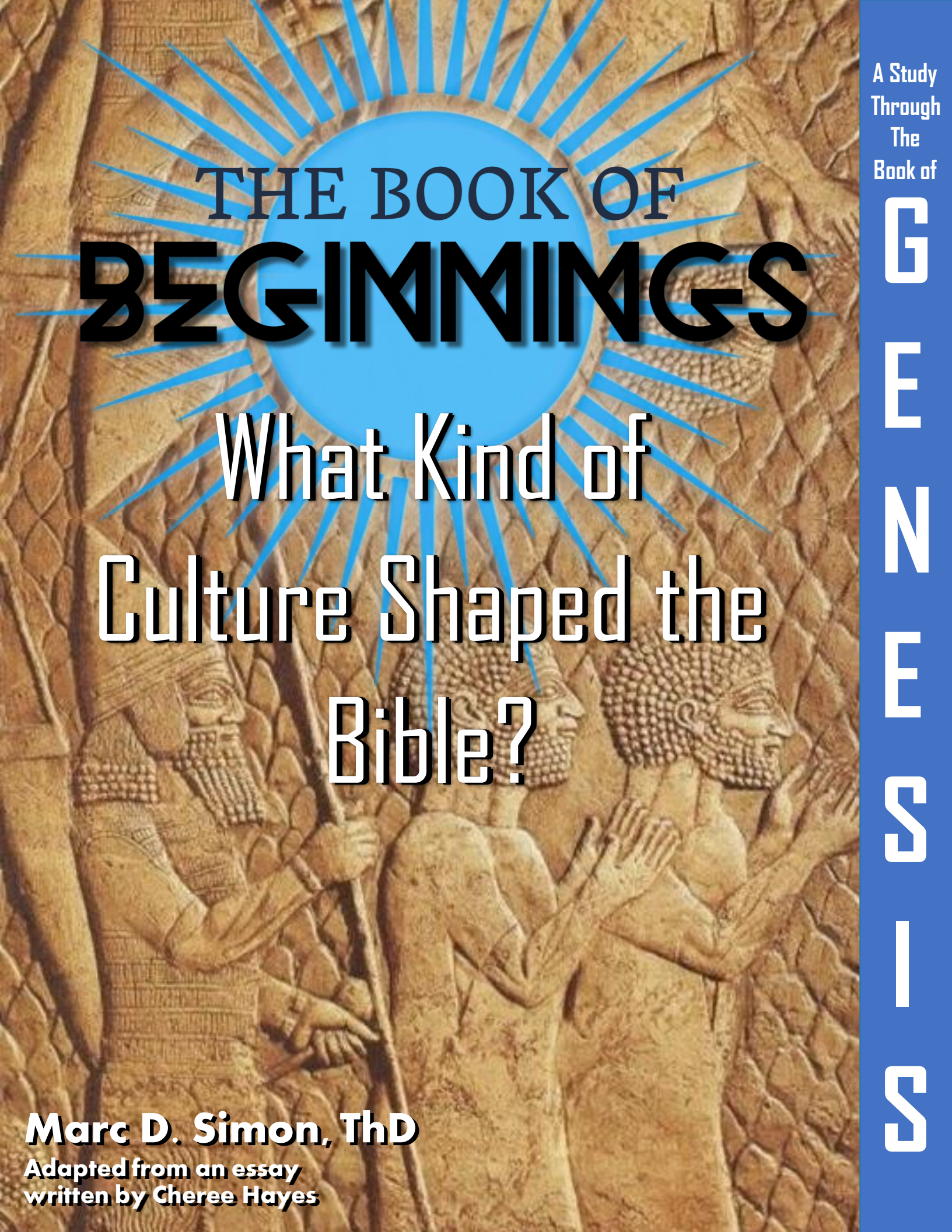




THE BOOK OF **BEGINNINGS**

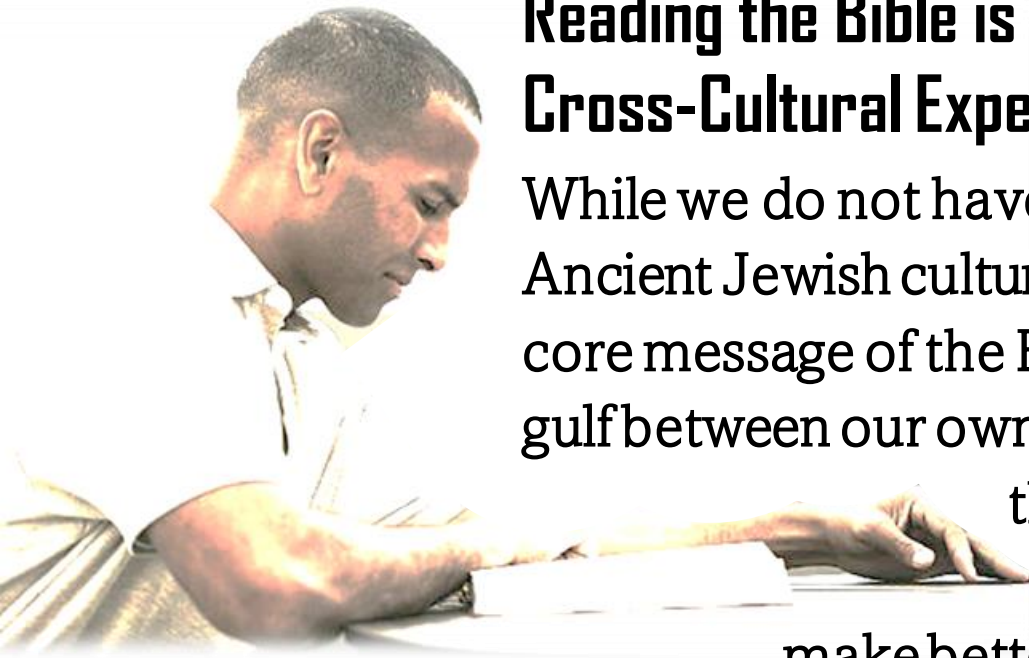
A Study
Through
The
Book of

**G
E
N
E
S
I
S**

What Kind of
Culture Shaped the
Bible?

Marc D. Simon, ThD

Adapted from an essay
written by Cheree Hayes



Reading the Bible is Almost Always a Cross-Cultural Experience

While we do not have to understand Ancient Jewish culture to understand the core message of the Bible, recognizing the gulf between our own cultural context and that of the Biblical writers can help us make better sense of the Bible itself, as well as its prohibitions and commandments.

Social and Cultural Blind Spots

A term frequently used in social science is ***ethnocentrism***, which is what happens when we use our own cultural lens to judge the behaviors and beliefs of people who are different from us. It is what we unconsciously do when we read about the lives and customs of people in our Bibles and attempt to *use our own social and cultural lens (which is unmistakably Western) to make sense of the attitudes and behaviors of people who were unmistakably Eastern.*



Reading the Bible in its own Context

Here's an example of a frequent blind spot for some readers. When we see the words "kingdom of heaven" (cf. Matt. 4:17), it is easy to assume that the word "kingdom" refers to a place in heaven or earth where men and women gather under the authority of a king. This view, while not inaccurate, only tells us part of the story. If we examine how the phrase "kingdom of heaven" is actually used in the Bible, we find that entering God's Kingdom is not simply about getting into heaven, but about living in the world as if heaven itself had already gotten into us (cf. *"Thy kingdom come..."*).

This means, casting down our own idols, such as ego and desire, and choosing to honor King Jesus as Lord. Following him means participating in what the Bible calls his kingdom. The point is: To truly hear the Bible's message (instead of our own), we must read its letters, poems, and stories within their own cultural and historical context, and stop reading them as if they were written within ours.



**"Repent, for the kingdom of
heaven is at hand!" ~ Matt. 4:17**

Conclusion

The ancient shepherds, farmers, and fishermen (among others) who wrote the Bible, spoke, thought, and wrote in a different cultural context than our own. As many of us open our Bibles to see and hear what God is saying to us through the ancient writers, we tend to do so with our modern social and cultural baggage still in hand.

This doesn't have to be a problem though.

We simply have to remain aware that we have this baggage in the first place [all people do], and then consider how it may be impacting how we read and understand Scripture.

Doing this will also help us to better appreciate the countless ways that God is still loving and healing our distinct cultures, all of them—both modern and ancient—and working to bring about the full blessing of His Son's Kingdom on Earth.

Grace and blessings!

– *Pastor Marc*