

The Pilgrimage  
Wendy Widder Huiskens, PhD

[www.the-pilgrimage.org](http://www.the-pilgrimage.org)  
[wendywidder.com](http://wendywidder.com)

## **THE BIBLE EXPLORED: SYLLABUS**

### **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

This course introduces participants to the origin, development, and characteristics of the Bible and to an interpretative method that respects the Bible's nature as God's word *to* his people in the ancient Mediterranean world but *for* people of every time and place. Participants will read a textbook on the Bible's history and will be invited to read/skim as much of the Bible itself as they are able. Journal questions will guide reflection on the content of the course, as well as the impact of the Bible in participants' lives. Participants will join in a weekly online small group for learning and reflection. Class sessions will revolve around PowerPoint presentations and discussion of the week's topics.

### **LEARNING OUTCOMES**

By the end of this course, you will have

- been introduced to the historical processes of the Bible's canonization, textual preservation and transmission, and translation
- considered the theological character of the Bible—its revelation, inspiration, and authority
- gained an appreciation for the historical process whereby the Bible has come to us
- learned the story that the Bible tells
- practiced a method for interpreting the Bible as an ancient book with timeless relevance

### **CONTACT TIME**

This class meets online for two hours a week for 8 weeks. The class will meet via zoom.us. An invitation with a link to the online "room" will be sent prior to the first week. The group's Personal Meeting ID is 998 2771 3187. Please save this ID and [the link](#), which will only be sent out once. You will need to download zoom to your computer/phone prior to the start of class. Do this by clicking on the link and setting up a participant account.

- In between classes, interactions may continue in writing—and class materials will be posted almost weekly—in a private group on Basecamp:  
<https://3.basecamp.com/4240551/projects/25831696>. Please make sure you are checking Basecamp regularly between class sessions.

### **OFFICE HOURS**

The best way to reach me is via the private message function (pings) in our class site. I can also be reached via email. I will respond to you as soon as I am able.

## TEXTBOOKS

Since this class is about the Bible, it seems like a no-brainer that we ought to try reading the primary text! You are invited to read/skim as much of the Bible as possible during this course, and some tips will be offered in the first class session for conquering this goal.

*The Holy Bible*. Any translation is fine, though if you take on the challenge to read/skim as much of the Bible as possible during the course, I recommend a translation like the NIV (New International Version), NLT (New Living Translation), or The Message (Eugene Peterson's paraphrase). You can find and read any of these online, if that's your preference (biblegateway.com is one place to find them).

Lightfoot, Neil R. [\*How We Got the Bible\*](#), revised and expanded 3<sup>rd</sup> edition. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003. This is a readable classic that adequately covers many of the topics we will address in class. It is decidedly Protestant in issues of canon but most of the book is still applicable to non-Protestants with interest in the Bible.

### **AND EITHER...**

Schiffman, Lawrence H., and Jerry Pattengale. [\*The World's Greatest Book: The Story of How the Bible Came to Be\*](#). Franklin, TN: Worthy Books, 2017. This is a fabulously readable book, produced by the Museum of the Bible. I highly recommend it as a broad overview of this course and because it's downright fun to read. Schiffman is Jewish, Pattengale is Protestant, and this book is for anyone who might step foot in the Museum of the Bible.

### **...OR**

Arnold, Clinton E. [\*How We Got the Bible: A Visual Journey\*](#). Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2008. Lots of color and pictures make this a fantastic resource (and even coffee table book) that hits many of the topics we will cover. Arnold is a Protestant.

### **Other valuable resources, depending on your level of interest:**

Ewert, David. [\*A General Introduction to the Bible: From Ancient Tablets to Modern Translations\*](#). Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983. This falls on the spectrum between Wegner and Lightfoot (see below). It is an older book, though that doesn't matter for most of the material. Ewert is Mennonite, so the book has a Protestant bent.

Sailhamer, John H. [\*How We Got the Bible\*](#). Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998. This is part of Zondervan's "Quick-Reference Library" series, which is a good description of its content and format. Its brief topical entries (e.g., "Book Making," "Composition of the New Testament") hit many of the topics we will cover in class. Sailhamer is Protestant, but his book is not detailed enough to get into the details of differences between canons.

Wegner, Paul D. [\*The Journey from Texts to Translations: The Origin and Development of the Bible\*](#). Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1999. This is the most thorough resource on the list. It is designed as a college-level textbook, so it is sizeable and fairly rigorous. It would make a good reference book if you are really interested in some of more detailed information in this course. Wegner is Protestant and makes his case for the Protestant canon, but he does a decent job of presenting material without offense to non-Protestants.

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS

- *Attendance Expectation* – Group dynamics are a crucial part of the learning process, so on-time and weekly attendance is *vital*. One absence per student is allowed but discouraged.
- *Reading* – Class discussions will entail readings done over the previous week. Reading is key to learning, so engaging the readings to whatever extent you can will enable you to participate more effectively in class. You are also encouraged to read/skim the entire Bible during this course—this is recommended, but optional. We will talk about how to do this during the first class session.
- *Journaling* – Each week includes questions for reflection. If you are a journaler, I recommend writing down your thoughts. If you are not, then reflect on the questions and maybe jot a few notes—but certainly be prepared to interact on the various topics during class.
- *Supplemental Exercises* – As appropriate, there will be other exercises and activities to complete throughout the course

## CLASS SCHEDULE

WEEK/DATE	TOPICS	ASSIGNMENTS DUE
Week 1 (Feb 3)	<b>Class Introduction(s)</b> <b>What Is the Bible Anyway?</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bible Basics</li> <li>• Revelation</li> <li>• Authority</li> <li>• Inspiration</li> </ul>	<b>Journal:</b> What has your exposure to and experience with the Bible been like? What questions/issues do you hope this course addresses?  <b>Supplemental Activity:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Bible Project Video: <a href="#">What Is the Bible</a></li> </ul>
Week 2 (Feb 10)	<b>Canon—and Canons</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Composition</li> <li>• Canon</li> <li>• Apocrypha</li> <li>• Pseudepigrapha</li> </ul>	<b>Reading:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lightfoot chaps. 1–3</li> <li>• Schiffman/Pattengale chaps. 1–2 <b>OR</b> Arnold pp. 6–19</li> <li>• Bible Reading: Skim Genesis–Ruth</li> </ul> <b>Journal:</b> If you’re familiar with the Bible, which parts of it have been the most meaningful to you? Which parts do you avoid? If you’re not familiar with it, what are your impressions of it?
Week 3 (Feb 17)	<b>Preservation &amp; Transmission</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scribal activity</li> <li>• The codex</li> <li>• Dead Sea Scrolls</li> <li>• Textual criticism</li> </ul>	<b>Reading:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lightfoot chaps. 4–6</li> <li>• Schiffman/Pattengale chaps. 3–4 <b>OR</b> Arnold pp. 20–33</li> <li>• Bible Reading: Skim 1 Samuel–2 Chronicles</li> </ul> <b>Journal:</b> Have you ever thought about how the Bible came down to us? If so, what have you thought? Does it bother you to know that there are mistakes in or differences between biblical manuscripts? Why or why not?
Week 4 (Feb 24)	<b>Why So Many Translations?</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How translation works</li> <li>• Assessing the value of a translation</li> <li>• Appreciating differences</li> </ul>	<b>Reading:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lightfoot chaps. 7–9</li> <li>• Schiffman/Pattengale chaps. 5–6 <b>OR</b> Arnold pp. 34–47</li> <li>• Bible Reading: Skim Ezra–Song of Solomon</li> </ul> <b>Journal:</b> What differences have you come across in different Bibles? What have you thought of these, and how have you picked (if you did) which reading is “right”?
Mar 3	<b>BREAK – NO CLASS</b>	

<b>Week 5 (Mar 10)</b>	<b>The Greatest Story Ever Told</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Genesis–Revelation, in one sitting!</li> </ul>	<b>Reading:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lightfoot chaps. 10–12</li> <li>• Schiffman/Pattengale chaps. 7–8 <b>OR</b> Arnold pp. 48–61</li> <li>• Bible Reading: Skim Isaiah–Ezekiel</li> </ul> <b>Journal:</b> How would you tell the story of the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation? Have you ever heard the whole story told at once? If so, where/when/who?
<b>Week 6 (Mar 17)</b>	<b>Reading the Bible Well</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Goal(s) of reading/interpreting</li> <li>• Kinds of reading</li> <li>• Interpreting an ancient text</li> <li>• Context, context, context</li> </ul>	<b>Reading:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lightfoot chaps. 13–15</li> <li>• Schiffman/Pattengale chaps. 9–10 <b>OR</b> Arnold pp. 62–75</li> <li>• Bible Reading: Skim Daniel–Malachi</li> </ul> <b>Journal:</b> If you read the Bible, how do you go about it? How do you pick what to read? Why do you read it? Do you always read it the same way?  <b>Supplemental Activity:</b> Bible Project Videos: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Old Testament Tanak</a> (13 min., a great summary of the organization and storyline of the OT)</li> <li>• <a href="#">New Testament Overview</a> (8 min.)</li> <li>• <a href="#">Story of the Bible</a> (6 min.)</li> <li>• <a href="#">Literary Styles of the Bible</a> (5 min.)</li> <li>• <a href="#">Ancient Jewish Meditation Literature</a> (5 min.)</li> </ul>
<b>Week 7 (Mar 24)</b>	<b>The Books/Genres in the Book, Part 1</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Narrative</li> <li>• Law</li> <li>• Epistles</li> </ul>	<b>Reading:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lightfoot chaps. 16–18</li> <li>• Schiffman/Pattengale chaps. 11–12 <b>OR</b> Arnold pp. 76–89</li> <li>• Bible Reading: Skim Matthew–John</li> </ul> <b>Journal:</b> Reflect on last week’s class and the idea of how to interpret an ancient text. Are you uncomfortable with reading the Bible in the way(s) described? Why or why not?
<b>Week 8 (Mar 31)</b>	<b>The Books/Genres in the Book, Part 2</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poetry</li> <li>• Prophecy</li> <li>• Apocalyptic</li> </ul>	<b>Reading:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bible Reading: Skim Acts–Revelation</li> </ul> <b>Journal:</b> Reflect on what you’ve learned in this course. What has been helpful? Rewarding? Troubling? Unresolved for you? Is there any particular element you wish we’d spent more time on?  <i>Please fill in the feedback survey when the course is all over! Thank you!</i>