

# STUDY HELPS (a)

## KEY DEFINITIONS

**TRANSLATION:** In biblical terms, this denotes the rendering of the original Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek Scriptures into contemporary languages and meaning. If you're not reading Scripture in one of the original three languages, you're reading a translation. Translations fall into a broad spectrum ranging from "Formal"—attempting to keep the literal, word-for-word form of the original language, to "Functional/Dynamic"—more concerned with the meaning or thought of the original words rather than the form. Both approaches are valid, and some translations blend these two approaches. If possible, read the same passage in several translations to get a fuller sense of what it is saying. Some examples of each type are:

**Formal:** King James Version (KJV), English Standard Version (ESV), New American Standard (NASB)

**Functional:** New Living Translation (NLT), Good News Translation (GNT), New English Bible (NEB)

**Blend:** New International Version (NIV)

**GENRE:** The Bible is composed of a number of books that fall into different literary categories. The major ones are narrative, epistle (letter), gospel, poetry, proverb/wisdom, and prophecy. Some books have more than one literary style. Keep genre in mind when studying a passage. It will help clarify its meaning. If you aren't sure about the genre of your text or book, consult your Study Group Leader.

**CONTEXT:** No biblical passage stands in isolation. Placing verses in their appropriate context, within their book and the entire Bible, is crucial to understanding them. It is also challenging! For an illustration of how a Central Idea may need alteration when seen within broader contexts, listen to the 2015 "Pulling It All Together" session (36 min). ([www.womeninthewordworkshop.org/listen](http://www.womeninthewordworkshop.org/listen) , Click 'All Audio')

**GENERAL CONTEXT:** This is the **Who, What, Where, When, Why** and **How** of each **book** and **passage**. Who is writing? Who is the audience? When was the book written? What was the writer's purpose? Where, geographically, are the events and original audience located? Who are the main characters? What events are going on in the background? Is this before the Incarnation, during Christ's ministry on earth, or afterwards? What is the tone of the passage? Is there encouragement, irony, instruction, personal testimony, rebuke, prayer, prophecy or simply facts and lists of names? It's all important, or God wouldn't have inspired men to put these things in writing. Do the research; it's well worth the work.

**REDEMPTIVE-HISTORICAL CONTEXT:** The BIG STORY, the overarching context of all of Scripture, is God's plan to rescue His people from their sin and rebellion against Him. From Genesis to Revelation, we get irreplaceable parts of the story, all pointing to the work of the One and Only Son. The Bible develops our understanding of God's redemptive plan by sometimes giving us illustrative, shadowy looks at things to come or by spotlighting how Christ – His birth, death, resurrection, and exaltation – fulfills all God's promises. Both OT "foreshadows" and NT "echoes" of OT themes are part of the richness of God's Word. We must keep our eyes on the Big Story as we study the subplots of individual books. For a quick guide to reading Scripture in its redemptive-historical context, see the article "[On Reading Bible Stories](#)" by Dr. Douglas J. Green.

**CENTRAL IDEA:** This is a statement that clearly expresses a key concept found in your passage about God and His redemptive plan. It is the main point you want to communicate to others from this text. **Example:** From Jonah, chapter 1—based on the repetition of the word "down"—a possible central idea is: "God's rescue plan is underway even as we flee down, down, down from Him!" A central idea for a text is refined and deepened by both its **general AND redemptive-historical** context. A passage may yield more than one central idea. See "[Writing a Central Idea](#)" for more specifics. Go to our website for additional central idea help. Click on Resources and in the section "Central Idea" are three YouTube videos you may find helpful.

# STUDY HELPS 2023 (b)

**IMPORTANT!** Before making use of **any** research tools, **READ YOUR ASSIGNED PASSAGE** multiple times. Read the surrounding chapters and, where possible, the entire book.

## RESEARCH TOOLS

**Study Bible:** In addition to the Scriptures, a Study Bible contains extensive cross-references, a concordance, maps, introductory or explanatory notes at the beginning of each book, meanings of names or unusual words, explanations of customs, tables of weights and measures, timelines, charts of times and seasons, etc. Study Bibles are available for most major Bible translations.

**Bible Atlas:** Shows maps of cities, states, nations and geographical features in various Bible periods, and details such as distances between locations and topography. These can be helpful in understanding the context of a passage.

**Bible Dictionary/Bible Encyclopedia:** A Bible dictionary defines words as used in the Bible. A Bible encyclopedia presents comprehensive information on people, places, and time periods in Scripture.

**Commentary:** A commentary presents the author's personal view of the Bible book(s) or text. A commentator's experience, education, theological training and practice will all influence his or her "take" on what the book or text says. **Please do the hard work of study and meditation on your verses before consulting a commentary.** Commentaries can be very helpful but can also unduly influence your gleanings in and opinions of the text. Use discernment. If you aren't familiar with commentaries, ask your Study Group leader for help.

**Concordance:** This tool lists some, many or all of the words in the Bible in alphabetical order, and indicates the location of verses in which that word occurs. A concordance is very helpful for relating New Testament passages to Old, and vice versa.

**Cross-References:** These link one Bible passage to another and are usually listed in a Bible's margins. These can be direct quotes or simply a mention or allusion to another portion of Scripture, and are well worth following up to flesh out the immediate context and to illuminate the redemptive-historical context.

**Online Resources:** There are many online resources that are easily accessed. Go to our website [www.womenintheworkshop.org](http://www.womenintheworkshop.org) for recordings of previous years' talks, booklists, and articles. Visit [www.biblegateway.com](http://www.biblegateway.com), where you will find numerous translations (in English and in other languages) as well as keyword search, topic index and other information.

**Your Study Group Leader:** She is available to help and she is familiar with the material. Ask!