

Biblical Worldview Scope for *World Studies* (5th ed.)

Introduction: This document is an attempt to answer (in the form of a scope) the question, “What must a student comprehend and value in order to understand world history from a biblical worldview?” What follows is a list of the themes that we believe are essential for students of history to understand and internalize. We anticipate that early in the course students will be required to *recall* and *explain* these themes. However, as these themes recur, students will also *evaluate* ideas, *formulate* a Christian understanding, and *apply* what they have learned to real-life situations. High levels of internalization result when students *apply* their learning.

Justice

Creation

God’s creation reflects His orderly character. He has given rules for how all things work together, including people. God expects people to conform to those guidelines because they are beings made in His image. When people treat one another in alignment with their Creator’s orderly design, justice is the result. God’s standards of justice are delineated through rights and regulations. For example, the right to life requires laws against abortion and murder, and the right to personal property means that theft is injustice.

God has tasked governments with the primary obligation of upholding justice (1 Kings 10:9; Ps. 72:1-7). Governments ought to encourage people to do right and to respect each other’s rights. Even if there were no sin, governments would still bear this responsibility in an unfallen world, mediating differing ideas about how to best steward God’s world.

Fall

Many individuals and civilizations have based their sense of justice on their own ideas rather than God’s revelation, leading to injustice. Historical conflicts were often rooted in differing standards of justice. Utilitarianism and egalitarianism, for example, are systems that usurp God’s direction by overemphasizing one good while severely undermining many others. The result is great evil and further injustice. When civilizations reject true justice, tyranny or anarchy ultimately follow.

Many leaders have chosen to ignore the idea of justice altogether and pursue personal gratification. They have ignored the rights of others and have perpetrated wrong against them, and in so doing have rejected the power or existence of God.

Redemption

Christians understand that perfect justice will come only with the consummation of God’s Kingdom, yet some progress can be made even now. Governments should try to attain true justice, and followers of Christ should encourage that pursuit. Christians should defend government’s God-given role to protect rights without partiality. This includes punishing those who violate others’ rights.

Believers should also consider biblically appropriate ways for citizens to press for change when injustice occurs, supporting gradual change rather than revolution. As they encounter instances of injustice in history, students should be able to propose biblical alternatives. In cases of contemporary injustice, they should consider biblical justice but also potentially take part in it. Ultimately, even when wronged, Christians can endure injustice on earth because they are assured of a future judgment.

Sample Objectives

- **Assess the impact of British control over India (15.3.2).**
- **Evaluate European explorers' treatment of native populations (5.3.5).**
- **Formulate a Christian view of interacting with diverse faiths in response to the Ottoman treatment of diverse populations within the empire (8.2.4).**

Power

Creation

Power, the ability to bring things under one's control, belongs ultimately to God. Yet God has given man dominion over creation as well as the power needed to exercise that dominion. Power is essential to any civilization for self-preservation. In order to uphold order, God gives positions of authority and additional power to some, such as parents over children and governmental leaders over citizens. Leaders are tasked and equipped by God to wisely guide communities and to uphold justice through power.

Fall

Power is often abused to the rallying cry of "might makes right." Those who wield power tend to pursue their own will against what is just. Culture, society, and institutions suffer when power is used to generate rather than resolve conflict. Powerful people enriching themselves at the expense of the vulnerable stand in stark contrast to the character and example of God, who cares for the weak and needy.

Redemption

The proper use of power requires wisdom, which is found in the fear of God (Prov. 9:10). As those in power recognize that they themselves are under a higher Power, they will fear His vengeance and refuse to abuse their power. Further, love for others will protect against abuse. Because Christ's greatest commands are to love God and to love others (Matt. 22:37–40), Christians should be exemplary in their proper use of power and should speak out against its abuse.

Sample Objectives

- **Assess the effectiveness of Russian imperial reforms (15.2.2).**
- **Contrast the development of absolutism in Europe with the development of limited government (9.1.2).**
- **Analyze the reasons many Latin American countries failed to develop into stable nations (13.5.3).**

Citizenship

Creation

God's design emphasizes personal responsibility. Every individual uniquely reflects his Creator and is accountable for his own actions. At the same time, community is also important in God's plan. Man cannot exercise dominion over the earth and thus obey God's command without cooperation. It was not good for man to be alone (Gen. 2:18). Indeed, man cannot come into being on his own; life requires a mother and father, which is God's design for a family. People are born into a number of communities not of their own choosing. On a larger scale, people exist within the context of a government as citizens (loosely defined to include subjects as well). A biblical approach to citizenship wisely balances rights and responsibilities.

Fall

Fallen men reject God's authority and the authority he has assigned to others. They tend to insist on their rights as individuals while not appreciating and fulfilling their responsibilities. In doing so, they also reject natural

connections to groups outside their own choosing (e.g., family, community, etc.). In essence, they put themselves in God's place and expect the state and others to serve them.

Governments sometimes absorb power and authority beyond God's intention, to the harm of individuals. Many people in history have been subject to tyrannical leaders. Tyranny fails to respect citizens' rights and dishonor God by dishonoring His image-bearers. It dehumanizes people and treats them like animals, emphasizing service to the group at the expense of the individual. Governments usurp God's authority when they claim ultimate authority over citizens' rights and responsibilities.

Redemption

At conversion, a Christian becomes part of God's church. This relationship with a community includes rights but focuses on responsibilities. Each believer is called to sacrifice for the good of others, which means learning how to prioritize others both inside and outside the church. God's people must champion the rights of others while faithfully fulfilling their responsibilities. They must learn to navigate a dual citizenship in the world and in God's Kingdom (Phil. 3:20), influencing governments to align more closely with God's design.

Sample Objectives

- **Summarize events that contributed to the rise of feudalism (2.1.4).**
- **Evaluate Marxism based on a biblical worldview (13.1.2).**
- **Apply the principles of justice, power, and citizenship to a current political conflict (14.3.3).**

Environment

Creation

From coastal plains to snowcapped mountains and scorching deserts to windswept tundras, the world is filled with incredible diversity. This variety extends to plant and animal life as well as natural resources. Diverse environments are highly significant to the development of civilizations according to God's plan and placement (Acts 17:26). God expects people to exercise dominion by adapting to their environments as well as adapting their environments to themselves, and He has given people authority to use natural resources for their benefit (Gen. 1:28–29).

Fall

As a result of man's sin, God cursed the ground and restricted its fruitfulness. Man now faces hard work to access limited resources. This difficulty and human selfishness have driven many civilizations to attempt to seize what belongs to others through war and coercion. Additionally, many ignore their responsibility as stewards and access resources in ways that are convenient yet needlessly damaging to the environment and to people. Some have gone to the opposite extreme, seeking environmental protection to the detriment of humans.

Redemption

Though environments are marred by the fall, God still expects people to exercise wise stewardship. They fulfill the Creation Mandate as they find ways to benefit man with little or no negative effect on the environment. Balancing environmental care and human benefit is an important skill to develop.

Rather than taking resources that belong to others, civilizations should pursue greater efficiency of what God has entrusted to them. Man must learn to be content, whether individually or in community. Governments should also promote trade and just relations with one another rather than relying on force to attain their goals. This ensures that everyone benefits from the transaction rather than one party taking advantage of another.

Sample Objectives

- **Relate cultural identity and moral evaluation to the worldview themes of justice, power, citizenship, environment, and religion (1.1.4).**

- **Assess the effects of the introduction of new plants, animals, and diseases on both the New and Old Worlds (7.2.4)**
- **Defend the claim that conserving the environment and opposing radical environmentalism are compatible agendas (19.2.1).**

Religion

Creation

One of man's primary purposes is to worship and obey the Creator. By His design, all people have an innate compulsion to worship. God's expectations for religion are clear through natural and special revelation. Whenever people form civilizations, they create religions to express their worshipping nature. Every culture is shaped by its religion, and religion is in turn gradually reshaped by culture as it evolves. Governments, as dependent on culture, are also thus heavily influenced by religion.

Fall

Fallen people know the truth about God, yet they refuse to worship Him. But that choice does not erase their need to worship. They satisfy this need by designing their own objects of worship (Romans 1:18–32). In addition to rejecting the truth about God seen in creation, they also dismiss the truth God has revealed in the Bible. The result is religion that serves people rather than the Creator, whether by promoting the worship of rival gods or claiming to worship no god at all (secularism). Throughout history, many civilizations have created new religions to legitimize their actions and values. In doing so, they used religion as a tool to benefit themselves rather than as a way to honor God.

Redemption

Because of Jesus' sacrifice, God is willing to forgive His enemies, even those who have chosen to worship false gods. He calls them to stop worshipping manmade gods and return to Him by believing and obeying the Bible. God has called Christians to spread this message, actively working to restore religion to its proper function by teaching and example. This requires pursuing a balance that gives religion a role in civic life without using it as merely a tool of governments. Followers of Christ must actively challenge false religions and false ideas about God and His world.

Sample Objectives

- **Identify major beliefs in Sikhism (8.4.3).**
- **Evaluate the Renaissance worldview (4.1.2).**
- **Defend the role of Christianity in promoting a just treatment of workers (12.2.5).**