Spiritual and General Worldview Inventory Questions
To Explore For Preparing Bible Storying Lessons
(Not all questions may pertain to your people. Some overlapping is intentional to verify consistency of information.)

1. Supreme God
   a. Do people know about a supreme God? Do they worship him?
   b. Do they recognize supreme God’s sovereignty over everything? (if not, over what?)
   c. What is his moral nature—benevolent, uncaring, harsh, evil? Other characteristics?
   d. Is he powerful? Does he have any limitations? (Can a person oppose him or hinder his plans?)
   e. Where does he live? Is he close or far away?
   f. Can he be seen?
   g. What is his name(s)?
   h. Does he have offspring? What are they like—humans? Spirits?
   i. How does he communicate with man? Dreams, visions, omens, by prophets, sacred writings?
   j. Can he see what people do? Hear what they say? Can people hide from him?
   k. Does he care what people do?
   l. What does he want people to do? What not to do?
   m. Does he love people, or is he indifferent toward people?
   n. Can people manipulate him—get him to do what they want?
   o. What relationship can one have to the Supreme God?
   p. Does Supreme God always keep his promises? Can his word be trusted?

2. Other Gods
   a. Do the people worship “other lesser gods”?
   b. Why do people worship these other gods—for adoration, out of fear, to gain some boon or favor? Is it because they are seen to be closer to the people than Supreme God?
   c. What are the attributes of these god(s)?
   d. Can these gods be manipulated?
   e. Can these gods be seen? Are they represented by any images?
   f. How do they communicate with people? Visions? Priests?

3. Spirits
   a. Are there good spirits or evil spirits? What is origin of spirits?
   b. Do people worship/appease these spirits? Why? Do people fear or respect the spirits?
   c. Where do the spirits live?
   d. Can they be seen? Can only certain people see them?
   e. What is the work the spirits do? Is their work good? Is their work evil?
   f. Can they be controlled or manipulated? How? By whom?
   g. Where did the spirits come from? Did someone make them? Are they the spirits of ancestors?
   h. Who rules over the evil spirits?
   i. Ask someone to draw a picture or in some way to depict the spirit world showing the Supreme God, other gods, the good and bad spirits and supreme evil spirit if such concepts exist. Indicate where people are in relation to the spirit world in the drawing.

4. Supreme Evil Spirit
   a. Is there a supreme evil spirit who rules over other evil spirits?
   b. Is the Supreme God more powerful than this evil spirit?
   c. Where did this evil spirit come from? What does he do? How does he work?
d. What will happen to him in the future?
e. Does he have a name?

5. **God's Word**
   a. Is there some source of religious knowledge or spiritual authority? A person?
   b. Is it written in a book? Who wrote the book? Is it reliable and true? How does one know it is true?
   c. Do people know about the Bible? Does it have a good or bad connotation? If good what makes it good? If bad why is it bad?
   d. What do they think its message to be?
   e. Have the people seen a Bible or read from a Bible?

6. **People**
   a. Where did their first people come from? Who made the first people in the world?
   b. Are some people of greater social rank or status (caste)? Why?
   c. Who are men and women accountable to?
   d. Are people basically good or evil?
   e. Was woman created differently than man? In what way?

7. **Death**
   a. What is death? Is this the future of all people?
   b. Can people put off or prevent death?
   c. Where do people go after they die? Do they continue to live somewhere else? Do all people go to the same place after they die?
   d. Can the dead still see, hear, walk and talk?
   e. Do the dead get hungry, cold, tired, lonely, angry, or frightened?
   f. Do the dead need anything from the living? How are these needs of the dead satisfied? How are provisions sent to them?
   g. Can the dead ever come back to life? If so, how? What are they like when resurrected (restored to life)?
   h. What is the relation of the dead to those still living? Can the dead affect the living in some way? Can the dead communicate with the living? Can the living communicate with the dead?
   i. What is the responsibility of the living to the dead? The dead to the living?
   j. Are dead people punished for their sins (wrongdoing)?
   k. Are dead people rewarded for living a good life and doing good things?
   l. Are people reincarnated (reborn) after death? If so, how? Into what or whom?
   m. Is it possible to know what will happen to one after death?
   n. How can a person know the best way for the future?
   o. Is a man’s future different from a woman’s future? In what way?

8. **Creation**
   a. Where did everything come from? Who made the world and all the animals, people and things in it?
   b. Were people a special creation? Are all people created equal?
   c. What makes a person alive? (Is there something inside a living person that makes them alive?) Is there some understanding of a soul or inner being apart from the body?
   d. Who controls and maintains the world?
   e. Will the world last forever?
   f. Are there stories about creation? Where can one find them or learn about them?
   g. How can one know which stories about creation are true?

9. **Holiness**
   a. Is there a concept of holiness among the people?
b. Is this considered simply as very religious, very good, or set apart (dedicated) in some way for a special purpose?
c. Who are considered holy among the people? Why? What makes them holy?
d. Are the gods or spirits considered holy?
e. Are places holy? What makes them holy?
f. Who can enter a holy place? Who is forbidden to enter a holy place?

10. Sin
a. What is considered sinful?
b. Why is it sinful (what make it wrong or shameful?)—who is offended?
c. Who accuses one of sin? How is sin judged? Who condemns the one who has sinned?
d. How must sin be punished? Who punishes the sinner?
e. Can another be substituted to receive the punishment for the sinner?
f. How can sin be atoned for—made right, restitution paid, the offended party appeased?
g. How do people know when they have sinned?
h. Have you ever sinned? In what way?

11. Social Discipline
a. What happens to a person who gets “out of line” in society? (misbehaves, acts contrary to accepted behavior or tradition)
b. How are they warned when out of line, misbehaving, failing to do what is right?
c. How are they tried? Who judges them?
d. How are they punished?
e. Can they be restored to society after punishment?
f. Is there a written or unwritten code of conduct for their society?

12. Judgment (Divine Retribution)
a. Is there a special time of judgment when all people will be judged for their actions in this life?
b. Where will this judgment take place?
c. When will it take place?
d. Who will be the judge?
e. Can anyone escape the judgment or resulting punishment? How?
f. Is there any concept of salvation—provision for escaping punishment or of a “savior” (deliverer or benefactor) to deliver one from punishment?
g. Who is a person accountable to in this life? In the next life or world of the dead?

13. Moral Values
a. Who is considered a good person? A respected person?
b. What makes a person good? Or bad?
c. Can this goodness be passed along to others?
d. What is the concept of honor among the people? Dishonor? What happens if one dishonors another?
e. What causes shame? How can a person remove their shame?
f. What is the attitude toward the property and possessions of others?
g. Is it okay to lie, steal or cheat another? If so, under what circumstances?
h. What about forgiveness when a person wrongs another? Is it a practice to take revenge instead of forgive?
i. When one steals or wrongs another what restitution is required?
j. Is revenge practiced? Is this to maintain honor?
k. How does one express love (caring and respect) for another person?
l. How can a person learn or know the best way to live a moral life? How is this learned from one generation to the next? Who passes it down?
m. Has anyone ever lived a completely upright and moral life? Who? How?
14. **Religious Practitioners**  
   a. What role do priests, shamans, witch doctors, herbalists or other religious practitioners play in society?  
   b. What power do these people wield?  
   c. Where do they get their authority and power?  
   d. Is society dependent upon them and their services? In what way?

15. **Spiritual Leader of Family**  
   a. Who is considered to be the spiritual head (leader) of the family—Husband or wife, elders, other?  
   b. How do they express or function in this role? Ritual leaders, keeper of sacred stories, intercessor by sacrifice or prayer?  
   c. How is this spiritual role passed on to others? Is spirit possession involved?  
   d. Who usually intercedes when there is family need?

16. **Sacrifices**  
   a. Do the people have a practice of offering sacrifices?  
   b. How does a sacrifice help a person?  
   c. Where do they offer their sacrifices?  
   d. What do they offer as a sacrifice? How does it qualify as a sacrifice?  
   e. Who may offer a sacrifice? Under what conditions?  
   f. Is the effect of a sacrifice continuous or limited to a specific act, occasion, situation or need?

17. **Worship**  
   a. Who or what do people worship—God, gods, idols, objects, invisible spirits?  
   b. Are idols gods or merely symbolic representations of gods or “husks” which the gods may occupy when they are present?  
   c. Why do people worship—adoration, fear, duty, to gain some blessing or boon?  
   d. Are there specific times of worship—holy days, designated times of day, a matter of the heart?  
   e. Who may worship? Anyone? Or only designated persons?  
   f. Can both men and women worship in same place? Any cultural taboos or restrictions?  
   g. Is a priest or other intermediary required for worship? How are they chosen or qualified to lead in worship?  
   h. Are psychotic drugs, plants or herbs used in worship to induce visions?  
   i. Are there specific places of worship? Are they oriented a certain direction? Why?  
   j. How are worship places chosen or qualified? Must they be situated in a certain place?  
   k. How are they considered holy, or in some way the area about it circumscribed?  
   l. Who may enter these places of worship? Priests only? Anyone?  
   m. What objects or other symbols are associated with their worship—altars, idols, pictures, fetishes?  
   n. Are offerings or sacrifices required for worship?  
   o. Is religious teaching associated with worship?  
   p. Is special worship apparel required?  
   q. Are hallucinogenic substances used in worship?  
   r. Are visions, apparitions, trances or imagined things associated with worship?  
   s. Have the people visited a Christian church building?  
   t. What do they consider Christian worship to be? Have any attended a Christian worship service? What was their opinion?  
   u. How would they compare a church building with their worship place or expectations of a worship place?  
   v. Can worship take place anywhere—like in a home?
17. Prayer
   a. How do the people talk to their god(s) or to the spirits?
   b. What is the prayer habit of the people? When? Where? Why—adoration and
      worship, duty, fear, thanksgiving?
   c. Who do people pray to: God(s)? Spirits? (good or evil) Ancestors? Idols?
   d. Is prayer a ritual saying or mantra? A beseeching for some need? A conversation?
   e. What other activities are connected with prayer—postures, offerings, etc.?
   f. What may be done to make prayer more effective—offerings, sacrifices, rituals?
   g. What can make prayers ineffective or disqualify one from praying?
   h. What happens if a person fails to pray, or prays wrongly?
   i. What if prayers are not answered, is there another to appeal to?
   j. How does a person learn to pray?
   k. Is there a special time for prayer—time of day, season, circumstance, etc.?
   l. Who may offer a prayer—anyone, or only a designated religious practitioner?
   m. Is there a practice of divination? How is it done? Who may do it? Is this the only
      way the gods or spirits speak to the people?
   n. Are dreams, visions, or psychic experiences important means of communication with
      the unseen spirit world?
   o. Could you write a brief description of a typical worship experience or observation?

18. Purpose of Their Religion
   a. People have different reasons for practicing their religion — to go to heaven, have
      adequate material provision in the afterlife, ward off evil, receive healing, provide for
      family needs, provide for agricultural needs, release from suffering in this life, be
      absorbed into some cosmic entity or the motherland, duty, find peace and freedom
      from suffering, etc. What is their main reason? Try to make a statement that sums up
      the basic reason for the people's religion and its practice of worship and petition.
   b. Is religion optional? Can a person elect not to have or follow the group’s religion?
      Be a free-thinker, atheist, or agnostic?
   c. Are there any who have left the religion of their parents seeking a new or better
      religion?
   d. What are the consequences for anyone leaving the prevailing religion? For their
      family?
   e. Would any say their religion had failed them in some way?
   f. How is their religion propagated—evangelists, catechisms, ritual or ceremony, other?

18. Syncretistic Elements
   a. Are there observable beliefs or practices which have obviously been borrowed from
      Christianity which if left unaddressed could lead to syncretism or new believers?
   b. Are there any parallel beliefs or practices which will need transforming when a person
      becomes a believer?
   c. Are there any elements of sacred objects, amulets, charms, or religious furnishings
      likely to be carried over which can encourage syncretism if not renounced, put away
      or destroyed?

19. Power Encounters
   a. Have there been any known instances or practice of demons being cast out of
      persons? By whom—believers or nonbelievers?
   b. Is demon possession or manifestation a common occurrence? What is people’s
      attitude toward this? Is it an accepted part of the religion or culture?
   c. Are miraculous healings known or common? By whom? Are these attributed to
      Jesus?
   d. Are there reported instances of the dead being restored to life? Revived by whom?
20. **How does the group relate to their neighboring peoples?**
   a. Would they be likely to share new information or beliefs with them?
   b. How would changes in one group affect another? Would persecution result?
   c. Is their religion a matter of national identity? (see #23 also)
   d. Is a people’s religion choice registered by the government or noted on identity cards?

21. **Social Elements**
   a. Are marriage partners restricted to only members of the prevailing religion? Will finding marriage partners for those leaving the religion be a problem?
   b. What other restrictions relate to marriage partners? Within family or clan? Outside family of clan?
   c. Is the group socially isolated by geography, language or religion? Is the group considered a minority people? How do they view themselves in relation to others?
   d. Could another group of similar people or those related in some way serve as a gateway, bellwether, or influential model for the target group?
   e. Has a person of peace been identified?

22. **Media Exposure**
   a. Are Christian radio programs in either the trade language or heart language being heard among the target group?
   b. Have any in the group seen or heard of the JESUS Film when traveling outside their area?
   c. Are there any “Christian” artifacts seen in homes such as “sacred heart of Jesus” posters, Scripture calendars or crosses? Crosses marked or painted on houses?
   d. Is Christian music in either the heart language or trade language available?
   e. Is television being viewed among the group? What kinds of programs are viewed?

23. **The Bible**
   b. What is their opinion about the Bible? Holy Book? Why or why not?
   c. Is the Bible considered to be true (a source of truth)?
   d. Are other religious books considered on an equal with the Bible?
   e. What is the people’s general source of information about deities and spirits, other spiritual issues? A book? Priests? Tradition of elders?
   f. Have the people heard any stories, proverbs or Scripture quotes from the Bible? Could they tell or quote any of these?

24. **Jesus Christ**
   a. Is Jesus Christ known to the people at all?
   b. What is understood about his relationship to the Supreme God?
   c. Is he thought to be a reincarnation or appearance of some other deity?
   d. Do they know where he came from?
   e. Do they know why he came to earth? What did he do during his life?
   f. Do they know why he had to die?
   g. Do they know what happened after he died and was buried?
   h. Do they know where he is today?
   i. Could they tell a story about Jesus?

25. **Holy Spirit**
   a. Is there a Supreme Spirit? What is his name (or what is he called)?
   b. Where does he live?
   c. What does he do? (his work)
   d. What is he like? (characteristics)
   e. Can he be seen or his presence acknowledged in some way?
   f. Is he associated with any other identity—like with the angel Gabriel? (Muslims)
26. Christianity
   a. Who are Christians? Do the people know any Christians?
   b. What are their beliefs? (What do people think they are?)
   c. How is their religion different from the people’s religion? How do the people perceive the difference? Good or bad?
   d. Is there any desire to be like Christians?
   e. What are Christians like? Are they perceived as good people? If not, why? What do people admire about Christians? Dislike about Christians?
   f. Is Christianity perceived as a foreign religion? A Western religion?
   g. Could a person be a Christian and still be a member of that society? Or is their dominant religion (or practice) considered mandatory for belonging?
   h. What is seen as the transition point for becoming a Christian? Baptism? Attending Christian meetings? Some kind of signaling of acceptance?
   i. Are there any known or dominant cults or so-called Christian sects in the area? What are their main teachings?
   j. Where does their knowledge about Christianity come from? Are there any Christian schools in the area, Catholic or otherwise, which community members may have attended and been introduced to some Christian teaching?
   k. Is there any evidence of anti-Christian teaching being circulated? What specific teachings?

27. Cultural and Religious Festivals—as cultural, societal, religious events these can have powerful influences over individuals in a people group.
   a. What are their festivals and what religious significance do they have?
   b. What do these festivals require of the people?
   c. Are there things associated with the festivals which are against God’s Word? Drunkenness, combat or sexual practices (fertility cults)?
   d. Will some of the rituals and events associated with festivals need to be replaced with “redeemed” events when the people become believers? Harvest festivals, marriages, funerals, coming of age rituals, etc.

28. How do the people keep alive (share) heritage stories?
   a. Who is the custodian of these stories?
   b. Are these stories told in a special place? By whom? When?
   c. Can anyone hear these stories?
   d. What can you say about the format of the stories or how the stories are told?

29. Who are the gatekeepers in the society who control what people believe and do?
   a. Are people free to change? Do women have freedom to do so?
   b. How do gatekeepers maintain their control—threat of excommunication, some corporeal punishment, threat of death?
   c. Are certain articles of clothing outward manifestations of the prevailing religion or social status?
   d. Would not wearing these articles of clothing be a problem for new believers, those leaving the prevailing religion?
   e. Are there food restrictions which are enforced for the prevailing religion?
   f. Is attendance at community or political events related to the prevailing religion mandatory?
   g. Is the ownership or use of agricultural lands, fishing resources or property restricted to those of the prevailing religion?
   h. Are burial rights (or cremation rights) or location restricted in any way for those not of the prevailing religion?
   i. Is access to agricultural labor limited or restricted to those of the prevailing religion?
j. Are access to wells, schools, clinics, co-ops and other community services restricted to those of the prevailing religion?

30. **In what language or format does new information come to the people?**
   a. From what sources? When?
   b. Does different kinds of information (agriculture, health, spiritual) come in different languages? Heart language vs. trade/regional languages?
   c. Do people share information and news in story form?

31. **Where or how do the people see themselves as needy (lacking) or needing change?**
   a. If people could change anything in their lives what would they change?
   b. If people could have anything they desired what would it be?
   c. Do the people consider themselves as blessed in some way? Cursed in some way?
   d. What would they like to remain unchanged in their society?
   e. Are people satisfied with their religion? What would happen if it changed?

32. **What changes are affecting the people?**
   a. What changes have occurred in their recent past that either predispose the society to change or that hinders change?
   b. What changes are presently occurring that are disturbing or unsettling to the people?
   c. What impending changes are feared to happen in the near future because of pressures building up?

33. **Are the people literate? Semi-literate? Non-literate?**
   a. Would they be considered oral communicators, preferring orality over literacy?
   b. Is there segmentation in their orality (literacy for certain people, others oral)?

34. **Other Spiritual Beliefs, Practices, Customs**—What other beliefs, practices or customs would affect any potential change in spiritual beliefs for the people? These may relate to taboo foods, cultural practices, sacred animals (totems), sacred places, sacred days or seasons, rites of passage (initiation into manhood or womanhood), festivals and rituals related to the natural or spirit world, citizenship identified with a predominant religion, fear of persecution and loss of benefits, etc.
   a. As a barrier making new teaching hard to understand, accept or practice?
   b. As a bridge making new teaching desired, acceptable, and facilitating understanding and practice?

**Other Sources of Information:**

35. Are there any instances of redemptive analogies present among the people? These are potential illustrations of redemptive truths which help people to understand the meaning of spiritual truths or happenings which predispose people to be receptive to the Gospel. Read Don Richardson’s *Eternity In Their Hearts* for more on this concept.

36. Have any doctoral or other secular studies been done on the people in which worldview issues are investigated and evaluated as to their effect upon change? Often these are later published in books. Many of these are done through Western university grants. Also look for local government studies particularly related to education, health and population, and agriculture. Worldview effects are generally related to why people are slow to change their beliefs and practices.

37. Check the internet for government studies and people group prayer and adoption guides. Take these studies as informative but not necessarily accurate as government departments may have agenda and religious sources may not be substantiated.

38. **Network with others** (both GCC and international government agencies) known to be working among the people group or language cognate or cultural/religious similarity.

39. **Local pastors and Christian religious leaders are generally not reliable sources** of worldview information as they work intuitively among their own people. However, new or recent converts among a people group may be able to tell what attracted them or
opened them up to the Gospel. Long-term and retired missionaries may have helpful information gleaned over many years of interacting with a people or their neighbors. Be prepared to question precisely rather than asking them to simply “tell all they know” as this may reflect more memories than usable information. Especially look for instances of difficult beginnings in a work or failure among a people. Ask what was learned when this happened.

40. As a general rule it is easier to get information by asking people what they do than to ask why they do it. Ask questions like: When there is no rain for your crops what do you do? When your children get sick what do you do? When someone dies what do you do? Look for trends by asking many people and look for common threads. Also look for practices that are dying out or that are no longer carried out. See if you can find out why as this may point to changing worldview.

One last thought:

You may already know a considerable amount of worldview information. One way is to use this inventory and see how many questions you can answer from you existing knowledge and experience. Another way is to put together a buzz group of people who know about or have worked among a people group; begin listing characteristics of the target people by categories. Record the issues and characteristics and then try to assess some priority ranking in the list. Especially zero in on those issues and characteristics related to spiritual change and openness.

Summary: There are often many cultural, social, and other barriers that a people may have. Their religion will be tightly intertwined with their society and culture. It will find expression in the cultural art forms and festivals. Be sure to look into these to see if hidden barriers may exist. Usually there is a fear that some of the culture will be lost if their religion is changed. Fear of offending the ancestral spirits or the ruling spirits is a major barrier in many societies. Barriers may have a sexual factor, differing significantly between men and women (issues like ritual purity from menses or giving birth), differing between young and old—older people generally being more conservative of the old ways, and younger people more curious and willing to experiment with new things.

This list is a resource and only suggestive for the worldview investigator. You may not need to investigate every category or every aspect of any one category. Some of the things will be observable. Some you will need to ask about. Some you may never get answers for, though in time you may be able to suspect an answer. A number of the questions are deliberately redundant to see if asking from a different perspective brings a different answer to test for uniformity of answers. If anything has been overlooked in this list, then add your own questions or rephrase these to be more appropriate or understandable for your people. Some issues may be explored better by asking people to tell you stories about evil spirits, worship, etc. and just let them talk. After they have had their say, then ask questions to clarify what they have offered. At times you may need to engage in exchange about your culture by offering to share from your cultures and let listeners compare and respond from theirs if they are willing.

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