Understanding Islam in the West (audio only)

Part 1 of 1: Understanding Islam in the West
with Darrell L. Bock, J. Dudley Woodberry, and Mark L. Bailey
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Mark Bailey: My name is Mark Bailey, I have the privilege of serving as president at Dallas Theological Seminary, and joining me around the table today is Dr. J. Dudley Woodberry who is the Professor of Islamic Studies at Fuller Theological Seminary. It's been our privilege to have him on our campus for a lectureship on missions and evangelism this fall and we're delighted that you're here with us.

He's a noted author. He's had extensive ministry experience in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia. He has served as a consultant on the Muslim world to President Carter, the State Department, and other U. S. government agencies. He continues to travel, speak, and write. Along with his responsibilities, he is a professor in the classroom with his students at Fuller Theological Seminary.

Also sitting around the table with us today, we're delighted to have Dr. Mike Pocock who is the Chairman and Senior Professor in our World Missions and Intercultural Studies Department and Dr. Darrell Bock who is Research Professor of New Testament Studies and Professor of Spiritual Development and Culture. Mike welcome to our table today to interact with us; we're delighted that you have taken the time to be with us.

Mike Pocock: Why thanks very much. It's great to be here.

Mark Bailey: Darrell, thank you again for being a part of another one of these discussions and we look forward to your questions and your comments as well.

Darrell Bock: It's my pleasure.

Mark Bailey: Dr. Woodberry, let me just start very basic. A number of people within our churches and probably within our own culture hear the words Islam, Muslim. How are those terms appropriately used? What's their appropriate connotation?

J. Dudley Woodberry: The root meaning of both of them is "to submit," with the idea of submitting to God. And so Islam refers to the religion although it is their submitting to God in a way that is explained in the Koran and by their Prophet Mohammad and a Muslim is a follower of that religion.

Mark Bailey: So Islam would be the religion, a Muslim is one who would follow the religion.
J. Dudley Woodberry: That's right.

Mark Bailey: Great, that's helpful. You've been lecturing this week on some of the cultural changes, the social-political, environmental factors that abound around our world and how God may be using that to have this as a prime-time with which to share Christ in Muslim lands. Can you comment on that? Let me ask it more specifically, what are some of the social and political factors God seems to be providentially using to allow the message of Christ to be communicated in lands known for their Islamic orientation?

J. Dudley Woodberry: Well we might talk about the "hand of God" in the "glove of current events" the first are political events. And the political events are causing turmoil when people are looking for God they are creating dissolution with the type of Islam that is frequently evident in our day and so some of them with that disillusionment are turning to Christ.

Then there are issues of natural disasters like this tsunami and the earthquake that has just gone on. As Christians had been ministering with acts of mercy in these areas there has also been responsiveness to the gospel.

Darrell Bock: Dr. Woodberry when people hear the word Islam I think many of them just think that there's just one thing out there. Help us to understand the nature of Islam today and the complexity of what the Muslim faith is.

J. Dudley Woodberry: Well you have a whole spectrum of Muslims. You have peaceful ones, you have militant ones you have these really in the various branches in Sunni Islam which represents the majority of Muslims and in Shiite Islam. So we can't really designate a people as particular militant or peaceful just by the type of Islam they follow because you are finding peaceful and militancy in people representing quite a spectrum of different groups.

Mike Pocock: We were used to the idea and begin to hear in the newspaper phrases like Shiite Muslims and Sunni Muslims and it seems that; even in countries where the United States is currently engaged there is more than one brand of Muslim you might say, and this actually is posing quite a difficulty in terms of uniting the country. Can you explain just a bit of the differences between the major sects of Islam?
Right, Sunnis are the majority group outside of countries like Iran, Iraq, and, Yemen and those have various kinds of Shiites.

But the Sunnis chose their leader after the death of Mohammad in the traditional way that Arabs chose a Sheik. That is the leaders of the community got together and chose whoever was most competent or most powerful.

The Shia, who had their historic roots in the area of the Achaemenian Empire where Iraq and Iran are today, they had a history of divine leadership that is where the king had a divine element there and so they wanted a leader who was the nearest male relative of Mohammad who would carry on the divine light as they understood it from Mohammad.

So that a Shiite leader speaks with far more authority than a Sunni leader because a Sunni leader it has to be his power or influence that provides leadership for him. For the Shia there's a sense that they have a divine element the light of Mohammad in themselves.

Beyond those major divisions of Sunni and Shiite Muslims today there's kind of a missionary outburst, I'd say of Islam and it seems to be of a particular variety and we all seem to be a little bit familiar with, not with what we think of as missionary, but, it's really destructive would be the violent arms of Al Qaeda or the Taliban.

Is there a particular kind of Islam that is different from all the rest? Can you explain that?

Well as I indicated the militancy can be found in various spectrums of Islam, in fact, what I sometimes think is helpful is draw a horizontal line from fundamentalist Muslims that is those who go back to the fundamentals of the Koran and the practice of Mohammad and then that spectrum goes all the way to liberal Muslims and even secular Muslims, people whose identity is Muslim, but, then they don't pray.

But then if we have a vertical line which is a line between militancy down to peacefulness then we could put in one quadrant for example the Wahhabi leaders of Saudi Arabia who were militant when they were fighting against folk practices, shrine veneration, and saint veneration in Arabia in years ago. But now that they have conquered Arabia, they are peaceful, that is the leaders of the royal family. But many of the Saudis themselves are militant because of feelings of injustice. So just the title, unless it's a title like Al Qaeda, doesn't indicate whether there is militancy there or not.
Darrell Bock: Let's talk about some of the basic elements of the Islamic faith. I take that that would be the intense, I might call "distanced", monotheism on the one hand and on the other, the Five Pillars. Could you talk about the Five Pillars, because that seems to be at the heart of the practice of Islam?

J. Dudley Woodberry: The Five Pillars. The First Pillar would be their confession of faith, which is that "there is no God but God" or Allah. They chose the word, Allah, that Arab Christians used at that time, and still use today. So it is a confession that the first half of which Jews, Muslims and Christians can agree on, that there is only one God. Then the second part of it "and Mohammad is the apostle of God, which of course, singles out Muslims distinctly.

The Second Pillar has to do with prayer. The prayer is a prayer five times a day. Its content, except for the reference to Mohammad at the beginning and at the very end, is similar to what Jews or Christians might pray as well.

Then you have alms giving. It's not the tithe that Jews were to give, and Christians to give. In most branches of Islam, is about two and a half percent of the negotiable, debt free earnings that they have. But, again, there's a commonality there between Jews, Christians and Muslims.

Then you have fasting. Originally the fast seems to have been during the 10 days leading into Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. But when the Jews of Medina where Mohammad was at the time, did not accept him and actually turned against him, there was a changing of the fast to the month of Ramadan.

Then there is the pilgrimage. The pilgrimage sort of baptized into Islam, we might say, the practices of a pagan ritual, but now identified them with Islamic themes. Although the Jews used to make a pilgrimage three times a year to Jerusalem, and the Muslims do it to Mecca, many of the elements are quite similar.

Darrell Bock: So what would be the Doctrine of God for the typical Muslim? And how do they view the Bible of the church?

J. Dudley Woodberry: First of all, their doctrine of God. As I indicated, they chose the word "Allah" that Arab Christians used at the time. There is verse in the Koran that says that "your God and our God are one" so they were trying to refer to the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Ishmael. Now what they say about that God, in some areas, is very similar to what Jews and Christians would believe, but in other areas extremely different.
Because the Christian would see God as revealed most fully in Jesus Christ. So in some way, Jesus could say "He who has seen Me has seen the Father." So it is not easy to say yes or no on "do we worship the same God?" We are referring to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, but our understanding of Him is different in some very crucial areas.

**Darrell Bock:** And the Scripture?

**J. Dudley Woodberry:** And the Scripture? The Koran says that it does not distinguish between the Torah, the Psalms, the Injil or gospel, and the Koran itself. But because there are some things in the Bible that are different, or things in the Koran that seem to contradict the Bible, most Muslims believe that the Bible got corrupted along the way at any point where it differs from koranic teaching, although not all Muslims believe that.

**Mike Pocock:** Worldwide there are over a billion Muslims worldwide, about one sixth of the world's population. I've heard that maybe 70 percent of those Muslims might be what we call "folk" Muslims, leaving only 30 percent orthodox. What is the difference between being an orthodox Muslim or a folk Muslim?

**J. Dudley Woodberry:** An orthodox Muslim is one who practices the Five Pillars of Islam and would find his or her faith expressed by the Koran and the practice of Mohammad, and law as it developed in the first 300 years of Islam. The folk Muslim is a mixture of that with pre-Islamic practices and beliefs that were in various countries that they went to.

So folk Muslims might go to the mosque on Friday, but during the week if their child is sick, they will go to a shrine and seek to get blessing or power from the saint who is there (dead or alive), they might wear amulets to ward off evil. They have many practices that are not in accordance in formal Islam.

Having said that, many Muslims, maybe the majority would be a mixture of the both. They would do their ablutions, which are ablutions that are very similar to Jewish washing of hands, nostrils, face and feet and so forth. In orthodox Islam, the meaning would be to cleanse oneself before prayer. The folk Muslim might see putting their fingers in their ears and nostrils with water and so forth as cleaning out demonic pollution. So the same form, but it would have additional meanings in folk practices.
**Mark Bailey:** Would that folk Islam vary depending upon the background or geography for which country that influence came?

**J. Dudley Woodberry:** That's right. That folk Islam would be the blending of various pre-Islamic practices and beliefs with the Islam that came in. Now the Wahabism that we hear about in Saudi Arabia, for example, was an attempt to cleanse these practices from Islam. It took a very militant form, originally, when Abdul Aziz Ibn-Saud, the father of the recent kings of Saudi Arabia, was conquering and trying to cleanse the land as he understood it. It is often taking a more militant form, not always, but often taking a more militant form in other parts of the world.

**Mike Pocock:** I understand, Dr Woodberry, that you work on a committee or an alliance of Muslims and Christians seeking to procure more peace and more well-being among Christians and Muslims living together as they are in the United States an in many other countries. What is like working on that commission, and what progress have you seen so far?

**J. Dudley Woodberry:** Well, first of all, it's something that I feel Christians should be involved in along with evangelism because Jesus said, "blessed are the peacemakers". Paul said in Romans, "seek to live peaceably with all people to the extent that you are able". So I see it as a Christian calling.

Having said that, what we are doing is seeking to find resources in our faiths that can be used for conflict resolution. Because if you go to the Koran, for example, you can find peaceful verses. You can find a verse in chapter five of the Koran that says, 'those closest to you in affection are those who say "We are Christians"'.

But then, in Chapter nine of the Koran, you will find a verse about fight against the enemies, including the people of the Book, which would include Jews and Christians, until they submit and pay the poll tax. When you go to the Koran, and when you look at history, you can find plenty for peace and plenty for militancy.

So we are trying to find those resources that can be used in our respective communities to seek to live peaceably with all people, as the Apostle Paul has enjoined us to do. We are working on literature that can be used with our communities. Although it is slow progress, we are content that it is moving along and will, hopefully, be helpful in our country.
Mark Bailey: I was taken with your comment. You were very quick to respond with the peace initiatives for conversation and living with well-being that wasn't in order to sacrifice evangelism or to eliminate your evangelistic fervor. Talk to us about the place of evangelism in relationship to a peaceful coexistence.

J. Dudley Woodberry: Well, I think the Bible is quite clear on its evangelistic mandate. We're told in Acts 1:8 to "wait in Jerusalem until we've received power then to be witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea and the outermost parts of the earth". We're told at the end of the Gospel of Matthew to make disciples of all people. So the evangelistic commission is clear.

But when we put beside that, "Blessed are the peacemakers, and seek to lead peaceably with all people to the extent that you are able", when in Jeremiah 29 we are told to seek the welfare of the city to which we have been taken for in its welfare is our welfare. Obviously these are both commissions that we should be working on and they do not need to be conflicting with each other. I think they are biblical callings that we can throw ourselves into wholeheartedly.

Mark Bailey: They're not mutually exclusive?

J. Dudley Woodberry: They should not be mutually exclusive, because if we see the gospel as proclamation and demonstration of the transforming work of the gospel, there's plenty of room to be involved in both. We should be involved in both.

Now, what our Lord did show is there are certain times where we should emphasize the deed. He healed the leper and then said tell no one. So there are certain times where we are demonstrating the deed. But ultimately, the gospel needs to involve both proclamation and deed.

Darrell Bock: As we turn our attention to what's going on today, I think it's clear that, for many people, the dominant image of Islam is that it is a violent faith, or at least there's certainly a significant wing of it that's violent. I think the question that I want to ask is that why is it that so many Muslims are angry? If you could summarize that for us. What is it that they're angry about?
J. Dudley Woodberry: Well, this has been building up for a very long time. You see, Islam was the superpower for over a thousand years. Now they have been dominated in many, many fields of life. In the Palestine/Israel situation, for example, land that for years had been under Arab - most of whom are Muslims, not all, some are Christians - but under Arab and/or Muslim control is no longer. That's one of the issues. Then you have the colonial period when most of the Muslim world, through World War II, was under Western, so-called Christian powers. Then, in the present situation, again they are dominated by non-Muslims in most areas of life. So, there's a great sense of frustration over this. Including now the fact that, although the war in Iraq and the war in Afghanistan was seen, at least by the United States and its allies, to free the people from very bad conditions, it was interpreted by Muslims... once they saw the bombs landing; these were bombs dropped by non-Muslims killing Muslims, and the emotion of that was very difficult for them to accept. Furthermore, although there are many Muslims who support democracy, liberal Muslims for example, there is that basic feeling among a large part of the Muslim community that everything would be solved if we just went back to the law of God as they understand it in what is called Sharia or Islamic law, based on the Koran, the practice of Mohammad and what developed in the first 300 years. Again, to see other systems of government, particularly brought in by non-Muslims, has been very hard for many of them to accept.

Darrell Bock: Another factor that comes in here is the perceived relationship between the West and Christianity for many Muslims, which perhaps is seen differently by people who live in the West, versus the way the Muslim world sees it. Could you talk about that a little bit?

J. Dudley Woodberry: Islam traditionally has not distinguished between what we would call religion and politics. Certainly in the medieval period we had Christendom, which would be Christianity in a sense determined by geographical barriers. You had the same thing in Islam, we might call it Islamdom. So, historically, both sides we might say determined their religious boundaries and their political boundaries were coterminous.
That is much more in accordance with Islamic basic theory. Our Lord said, "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and unto God the things that are God". But they look through their own lenses, their own glasses. We should be looking through the glasses of the New Testament, where we can serve God even if we are not in a Christian nation. We can serve God as Christians under, communist, atheism or Calvin's Geneva. We don't have to have a Christian government in order to serve God.

**Darrell Bock:** So, the effect of that is that whenever a government in the West does something, they're likely to view that as also being Christianity doing something. Is that right?

**J. Dudley Woodberry:** That's right. And you heard this with Saddam Hussein way back in the first gulf war, where he called it a crusade - that is, the Western invasion as a crusade. And then some of his Christians in Iraq said "No, just a minute", and he began dropping the use of the word "crusade." But, when you look at, or listen to, what Osama Bin Ladin said around the time of September 11th, and you listen to some of the statements that have come out from the militants - they keep using the word "crusade" and making our political agenda, in the West, and our religious agenda overlap.

**Mike Pocock:** This has really been a tremendous week on campus to have you here, because your lectures to the whole campus every day have been really valuable, and tremendously encouraging, of course, also to the Department of Missions and Intercultural Studies, who are viewing this from a particular point of view, with a great deal of personal interest.

Can you tell us how missions to Muslims have changed over the last 20 years or during your own period of awareness? It's always been viewed as a rather difficult task, to minister among Muslims - and that there were really not very many workers who were Christians ministering to them. Have workers increased? And is there, today, any greater fruitfulness of ministry among Muslims than there used to be?
Things have changed recently, particularly with the focus on the
so-called 10-40 window, which is an area of the world that includes
the major Muslim world along with the Buddhist and Hindu worlds
as well. So that focus has brought more missionaries. Because
many of the Muslim countries are now independent and many of
them do not want missionaries, the Christian missionaries have
often had to find some job that the government of those countries
does want; and, so, they can do that with integrity but also be there
as a Christian witness.

Now, as far as results go, the results have been phenomenal.
There's also been more opposition to the Christian gospel, with the
gulf war and the Iraq war and the Afghan war and so forth. But
there's also been a lot more receptivity. And the receptivity seems
to be related to the fact that many Muslims are disillusioned with
the type of Islam they're seeing; that is the more militant form.
And, as we've indicated, that's just one stream within the Muslim
world today. But this is creating a disillusionment; and, whenever
there has been a friendly Christian presence where Muslim
governments have either taken a more militant form or tried to
impose Sharia, or Islamic law, on the people, we have been seeing
considerable responsiveness. And this has been in numbers of
areas, particularly north Africa and parts of South Asia.

If you could single out any specific factor that would make the
biggest difference, in terms of outreach, and effectiveness of
outreach, to Muslims, what would it be, whether it's an individual
who's working as a missionary among Muslims or whether it's just
a person right here, in the United States, whose neighbor is a
Muslim? What are going to be some of the big factors in having
any kind of a positive effect on them, from a Christian point of
view?

Well, we have done a study, now, of about 650 Muslims who have
decided to follow Christ, from 40 countries around the world and
58 ethnic groups. And, by far, the biggest reason that they gave for
wanting to follow Christ is the lifestyle of Christians. And, so, I
would say, the lifestyle is something that Christians can do
anyplace.
Now, there are usually about three factors in conversions. One of them is seeing loving acts of mercy by Christians around them. One is some portion of scripture that has been particularly relevant to a special felt need by them. And the third is some experience of Christ in their life, such as - they chose the power of God through Christ, where there may have been a healing because they prayed in the name of Jesus, or it could be a vision or a dream that they had, something of this nature. All of these seem to be out there, and are given by Muslims as major reasons for which they decided to follow Christ.

Mark Bailey:
We've touched on it: the fear, the threat, or the perceived threat of the more militant. How serious, or how widespread, do you think, the agenda is that, we hear, that is a part of fundamental Islam, to eliminate Christians and Jews from the land or a particular land? That kind of a quotation is often given as a part of orthodox, fundamental Islam. How serious is that?

J. Dudley Woodberry:
Well, both Christianity and Islam are worldwide religions, with an agenda to lead the world to Christ, so from that point of view, there's some commonality of what our agenda is, although, because Jesus taught to turn the other cheek and told Peter to put up his sword when he was going to use it - when he started to use it to protect Jesus before the Crucifixion - we, of course, don't see that the military agenda should be part of extending the Kingdom of God as we understand it.

We also need to understand that, historically, Islam, from the very beginning, had a place for Jews and Christians: they were called "Dhimmis"; they were to be protected as long as they were loyal. And we also have to confess, to our own shame, that, historically, Muslim rulers were often better at protecting the Jews and the Christians in their empires than some Christian emperors were in protecting Jews and Muslims in theirs.

Having said that, particularly for the militants, there is an agenda that involves, today, military action as well. But, when we look historically, Islam in the first hundred years, spread the empire - not the faith, but spread their empire - by the sword. And then they created an ambiance that facilitated conversion; and then the conversion of the people happened over the next 200 to 300 years. Now, certain strategists, some time ago, set up the reverse strategy for the West - that is, lead to converts and then, with enough converts, there will be an ambiance there that would favor Islam and then the political agenda would be there would be there.
Having said that the majority of Muslims who have come to the West did not come to the West to establish Islam or what they had back home. They came to the West because they wanted greater freedoms, greater economic opportunities and so forth. And so for a majority of them, as I understand them, they are here for the freedoms including the freedom of following your own faith according to conscience and your understanding of God's will, not to establish Islam here. So I think, although we always need to be alert to what is going on, and guard against the misuse of our freedoms, I don't see it as the agenda of most Muslims in the West.

**Darrell Bock:** So you advice to someone who has a Muslim neighbor, for example, would be to befriend and engage them like they would anybody, and not to view them as all that different, or quite so foreign. Is that the general direction you would go?

**J. Dudley Woodberry:** That would be very much the direction I would feel would be following the pattern of Christ in this matter, certainly. Furthermore, when we look historically at, about every hundred years you've had a religious resurgence in the Islamic community which has often but not always taken a militant form. But this has happened when the Muslims themselves have felt threatened in some way. And so, even though as Christians our motivation for being friendly shouldn't be to make it better for ourselves, necessarily, it should be because that is the pattern of Christ. The end result when Muslims don't feel threatened, at least learning from history, would seem to be that things would get better. There would be less militancy as we ourselves help them find their identity and feel that they belong in our context.

**Darrell Bock:** What bridges would you suggest building as you talk about God and faith with someone who comes from a Muslim background?

**J. Dudley Woodberry:** Some of these bridges are along the lines of particularly Old Testament values of justice and such, that we find in our scriptures. This would be one of the major areas for building the bridges, because we do have some very common values. Also, these would extend to, we have family values, as opposed to the secularization that goes on. We can unite with Muslims against the secularizing forces we that see in the school.
Although our country has chosen to distinguish, in one sense, between religion and politics, both Muslims and Christians believe that God should be central in the way we conduct politics, even though Christians in this country would not support having a certain religion dominate the politics. So I think there are lots of areas where we can share with Muslims on moral issues and such.

Mark Bailey: You've traveled extensively in Arab lands where Islam has been predominant. You've lived here in the United States and taught here, and are watching, as you mentioned, the migration of, whether they be folk or orthodox Muslims to our country. Would the strategy be any different for a person working overseas, ministering overseas? What advice would you give to someone who, whether they are in ministry or not in ministry, but want to have an effective witness? What are some pieces of advice that you would give to someone going into one of those kinds of countries that may not be receptive to Christianity for political or cultural reasons?

J. Dudley Woodberry: I would say one of them is, because in many Muslim countries we have to have a job that the country does want in order to the get visa to be there. In very few countries can you go in as a stated missionary. To make sure we do our jobs well, and that we have integrity in the way we do our jobs, but as we do our jobs to do them with Christian values. And this can give opportunities to share from time to time.

I remember when we lived in Saudi Arabia, one of our parishioners who worked in a hospital there, where most people there had a Saudi counterpart that they worked with. One day the Saudi counterpart said, "I've been wronged by so-and-so. I guess this time I probably should forgive him, don't you think?" And our friend said: "Well Jesus said you should forgive 70 times 70." So just gradually to begin to show what living by Christian values can do in transforming society. That can become very attractive when they see the problems of one person does something and the other retaliates and then the other retaliates back and forth. These values can make a better society for all of us. Ultimately they see that these as values can come through the transforming work of Christ.

Mark Bailey: This has been very helpful. We so much appreciate your time with us. Gentlemen, thank you. Dr. Pocock, would you just close us in a word of prayer. Ask God to give us wisdom, and those especially who are the front line contact window, as we live the life, and as we proclaim the gospel.
Mike Pocock: Certainly. Heavenly Father, indeed we are grateful for the presence of Dr. Woodberry on our campus this week. We thank you for the influence he has had among our students, and the clarity with which he has spoken of the nature and needs of Islam, and the approach of Christianity to it, and of Christians. Father, we lift up to you right now all those who are living among and ministering among Muslims.

That they would be able to live their lives transparently, manifesting Your grace, showing full integrity and excellence in all they do. So that as those who surround them and wonder what a Christian really is like, what a person looks like who has been transformed by Christ, they would be able to see your clearly in them. We pray that, Lord, not simply for those who live in areas where the majority of the population is Muslim, but also for our own country.

Because we live in such a diverse nation where many of our neighbors come from various areas of the world and different religions. We pray, Father, that as neighbors, we would become good neighbors; people who would extend ourselves for their well being. Who really do think about their Shalom.

Even as Prophet Jeremiah told the Israelites as they went up to Mesopotamia and were captives there, to nevertheless to seek the shalom, the well being, of the people that the Lord has taken them. Now Lord, we are not captives in our own country, nor is anyone else a captive here. But Lord, we pray that we would work towards the well-being of all our neighbors, no matter what their religion may be. We ask it for the sake of Your glory and the extension of the gospel. In Jesus' name, Amen.