Living and Ministering in the Middle East

Part 2 of 2: Westerners’ Most Common Misconceptions about Islam
with Darrell L. Bock, Anna, and Fikret Bocek
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Darrell Bock: Now you said that your brothers have all come to faith as well. Is that correct?

Anna: The time I was seeking out more who Jesus is, when for the first time I had a Bible in my hand in '87, that time, my brothers returned to Islam, even though they were like me as we were growing up. One person give my brother a booklet that's called The Miracles of the Koran, and they claimed the scientific, hysterical, prophetic, numerical. And so one of my brothers embraced that very well, and he give it to the rest of my brothers; and one after another, they just became Muslim.

At the same time, I was seeking out. There was a lot of conflict. At some point, I even came to doubt Christianity when I had the Bible in my hands, and I read the words of the Lord Jesus about true worship that the Father is seeking – those who worship him in spirit and truth. When I went with my mom to that church, it was a traditional church, and somehow I felt myself troubled not knowing how to approach God in prayer – which saint should I pray to?

And if I don't pray to this person, this person – I was so confused to the point I said, "Well, maybe after all, I can't find Christianity, I can't find God in Christianity."

All along I thought he was there. But now that I'm exposed to the church, well, I can't find him here. I didn't find him in Islam, and now I can't find him in Christianity. But then I said, "Well, God can be only here or there. So where is God?"

And when I saw my brothers the way they were worshipping their god and on their faces constantly, I said, "Well, maybe, maybe because I studied Islam for 12 years in school as a religion, I have to pass it, otherwise I can't graduate to the next grade. Maybe I missed seeing God there. Maybe if I studied it personally and deeply, and read what my brothers are reading, maybe I would find God since I couldn't find it in Christianity."

As I read more about these books and the booklets that my brothers were gladly giving to me, it only confirmed to me that God cannot be in Islam.

Darrell Bock: But your brothers did eventually come to faith in Christ? Is that right?
Anna: One of them after 15 years praying for him, he came to know Jesus personally. And it was interesting. It happened after September 9/11, September 11, when people became interested in knowing about, "Who are those Muslims? Why are they doing this to us?" One lady approached my brother. He happened to come to the US, and she approached my brother and found out more information – and, especially, he was a Muslim and he left still his family in the Middle East, and she was asking him questions. But at the end of her conversation, she offered to pray for him. She said, "Can I pray for you?" And she ended her prayer in Jesus' name.

That made my brother give me a call and ask me, "I have a lady who did this. I want to know, is this lady, does she have the same faith as you are?" I said, "Next time you meet her, ask her, 'Are you born again?'"

And from that, it opened tremendous conversation between my brother and I, where it was every day for hours. My brother became very interested and kept asking questions. Three months later, he prayed to trust Jesus with me on the phone, and it was like the greatest miracle for me that I saw happening, because I thought, "From all people, that God is using me with my brother, that they were rejecting to hear me."

They were rejecting me because of what I had done, embracing – it was a shame to them. It was like they were embarrassed. People asked, "Oh, your sister is a Christian," so they were embarrassed culturally. And then they would not listen to a woman.

So for me when I saw that, I saw how the Lord honored the prayers of many people where I was asking them always pray for my family, pray for them. And the Lord just opened his eyes. And one day after three months on the phone I was talking to him, he said, "I got it, I got it, I got it! Now I know why God has to come in the flesh to save us." And he was just jumping up and down and was very vocal about his faith.

Darrell Bock: That's an incredible story, a great story. Fikret, I'm going to turn to you now and talk about the incident that I want you to describe. Anna has described how death can be threatened, but in fact, oftentimes, death does come as a result of persecution. Share your involvement in an event that actually many Americans do know about, because it did actually make the news here. Tell the story of the missionaries who were slain in Eastern Turkey a few years ago.
Fikret Bocek: April 18, 2007, we lost three of our brothers – two Turkish brothers and a German brother who was a missionary – in Malatya, Turkey, Eastern Turkey. Necati, the pastor of the Malatya church, he was planting that church with his two brothers who died with him. He went there towards the end of 2003. He believed that God was calling him to plant a church there. There were about a million people, not just in that town, but in the towns surrounding that town, and we did not know of a single convert in those areas. He went out there, then this German brother joined him, and they seen some converts. I remember the same year, in 2007, we were talking and joking about his church being a mega church – six converts.

Darrell Bock: Six converts is a mega church. That's a new definition of an emergent church. Amazing.

Fikret Bocek: There were no other churches around you, there are no Christians around you, and you are the only church. You can call yourself a mega church.

Darrell Bock: Okay.

Fikret Bocek: But there was a group there. There was a nationalistic group, not necessarily an Islamic group. It was more like a racist group that did not want them there and were threatening them. And the people of Malatya are really hospitable and inviting. And, of course, you can't go out and distribute Bibles. You can make friends; and slowly as you develop relationships, you can share the Gospel. In their case, five young Muslim men were interested in studying the Bible, and went to the Easter celebration a week or two weeks earlier; and then they wanted to come and study the Scriptures more deeply in their office. And they came in, ready with towels, with ropes, with guns, and knives; planned their action; and went in. There were three brothers at the church office. As the Bible study started, they pulled their guns and knives. We don't know all the details about what kind of conversation happened between them. So basically, they were all stabbed and their throats were slit. We know that one of the brothers, the last brother – all the five killers were arrested, and one of the killers was saying that the last brother they killed, as he was dying, he was just saying, "Messiah, Messiah." So they were all – all these church planters were massacred.
Initially, the news, the national media said it's the Islamic and Islamic group must have done it. But within a year, we started hearing that it was actually some members of the Turkish military that were involved. The court case is still happening, and they've had over 40 hearings. The five young men will definitely get probably life in prison. They arrested a retired general, a colonel, some other military officials. I can't go much into the depth of this case, since it's still going. But basically, the claim is that the Turkish military did this to put this on the Islamic political party that is in power today, basically saying that, "Look, leaders from Sunni background are dying, leaders from Alawites are dying or are being killed, Caliphates, Orthodox, and now the evangelicals are being killed," and there were elections that year. And so that basically is the case of the prosecutor.

**Darrell Bock:** So it was an effort to shame the political party basically?

**Fikret Bocek:** That's correct, yes.

**Darrell Bock:** Wow. You've mentioned that your background – was your background Sunni as well? Did you say that? Did you mention that earlier?

Distinguish for people, because people in the West just think Muslims are Muslims. I mean they don't know the differences between the various groups. Can you talk a little bit about that? What's the difference between a Sunni and Shiites and that kind of thing?

**Fikret Bocek:** Well, we don't have very many Shiites in Turkey, and with the Sunnis, they follow the teachings of the Koran and the Hadith. And their worship places, at least here in Turkey, are mosques and they pray five times a day.

With Alawites, which are around 12 percent to 16 percent of this country – and we're seeing many converts from that background, Alawi background. They do not go to mosques, they do not pray five times a day, and they follow the teachings of different Imams that were followers of one of the Caliphs – Caliph Ali – and most of the Sunnis would line under Uthman.

**Darrell Bock:** So this is actually – you're in Turkey – but this is actually part of the tension that exists in Syria today, isn't it, between the Alawites and the – is it Sunnis or Shiites in Syria?
Fikret Bocek: Alawites, Sunnis. Syria is predominantly Sunni, but the rule family is al-Alawi – our Christians as well, which are in-between this war.

Darrell Bock: Caught in the middle.

Fikret Bocek: Like between the Alawites and the Sunnis. Turkey is predominately Sunni, and the Gulf States, except Iran – the Gulf States are predominantly Sunni, and they're all supporting the Sunni rebel movement. Turkey believes that there is a Sunni crescent – I'm sorry. Turkey believes that there is a Shiite crescent forming since Alawites are very close to Iran, or the Shiites. Iraq is now a Shiite government, and if they take Syria as well, then they come to the warm waters and control part of the Eastern Mediterranean. So the Turkish state and the other Gulf States are supporting the rebels in Syria – the Sunni rebels only, against the Alawite government in Syria.

Darrell Bock: Interesting. Now, Anna, I didn't ask what your background of your father was in terms of Islamic practice. Did he belong to a particular – or associate or identify with a particular group within Islam?

Anna: Sunni, Sunni.

Darrell Bock: He was Sunni as well.

Anna: Yes.

Darrell Bock: And so I take it from listening to this that the Sunnis are the predominant majority of Muslims, Fikret. Is that right?

Fikret Bocek: In the real world, yes.

Darrell Bock: Yeah. But in certain pockets, the other groupings will dominate in small – well, not in small areas, but in certain countries, in certain contexts. Is that right?
Fikret Bocek: Yes. Predominantly, the Islamic world, when you look at the Islamic world, it's mostly Sunni. Then the Shiites will come. And we also have the Shaffites. I don't know if the Shaffites are in other countries; but in Eastern Turkey, there are Shaffite Turks, Shaffite Arabs, and Shaffite Kurds.

Darrell Bock: Now, there's a question I always ask when we do these podcasts on life in Islamic context, and that is, help us with misconceptions that Westerners have about Islam. If you were to identify some misconceptions that Westerners have about Islam, what would some of those be? I'll start with Fikret, and then Anna, I'll let you answer it as well.

Fikret Bocek: Well, there is this fear, you know, when you start talking about Islam, or I tell them that I used to be a Muslim – there's this general preconceived ideas about Muslims. I know among the evangelicals in America, there's the desire that the Gospel must be preached among the Muslims, and most people don't really know how to approach a Muslim.

A Muslim will come and say, "The Bible's been corrupted." They'll come and say, "The Bible's not the Word of God. The Bible has no authority." But you know, the Muslims believe the Bible hasn't been corrupted. The Koran teaches the Bible is true and reliable, with some qualifications of course. The Koran not only teaches that the Bible is the Word of God, it also teaches that no one can alter God's words. And this provides us with a line of argument that becomes very difficult for a Muslim to ignore.

We open the Koran and show them that the Koran says the words of God cannot be changed or corrupted. The Koran says the Bible is the Word of God. And we tell them, therefore, on the Koran's authority, the Bible could not have been changed or corrupted as many Muslims would claim. And when we tell our Western friends, American friends that, it's actually easy to talk to Muslims – just get to know them, get to know their Koran, you know, what the Koran teaches, especially about the Bible; and bring your Muslim friends to the Scriptures.

It's not really that hard. Once we get over this corruption myth that the Bible's been corrupted as the Muslims say, then it really becomes a great conversation with our Muslim friends. We sit down, look at these verses, and just basically tell them that, you know, on the Koran's authority, the Bible could not have been changed and not corrupted. And, actually, Koran recommends them to read the Bible, and the conversation begins.
Darrell Bock: Mmm, that's interesting. Anna, what misconceptions do you see Westerners often having about Islam?

Anna: Especially after September 11, people see them as militant terrorists, but that is not true of all Muslims. There are pockets of them, there are, and that's because you have – it's a complex thing, because in the Koran itself, you have verses that they're very peaceful, and you have verses that they're not. And so depending on the interpretation of the leader, then you can become a militant or you can be relatively peaceful. So I would say the majority are probably peaceful.

I grew up in a peaceful environment where they have a misconception of the West, and the moral of the West, because that's what TV portrays for them. That's not true. So somehow, people stereotype and it's not – well, that's human nature, people always stereotype – but that's not true. From my growing up experience, it's not true; the people I know, it's not true. My own family, it's not true, they're peaceful. But there are pockets of them, but it's depending on the interpretation.

Darrell Bock: So what you're saying is, is that sometimes there's a violent form of Islam that exists, but there also are many, many places where people who are Muslim are just trying to live their lives – and I can say it that way – in the context of their own faith, and are not hostile in that sense. Is that what I'm hearing?

Anna: Correct. And it was that way for me growing up, because all of Muslim in school – we have Christians as well. The relationship was very well. There is a respect. Each person lives his own belief without necessarily hating one another. But there are pockets of them, like I said, depending on the interpretation, such as Osama Bin Laden, the way he interpreted the Koran. Well, maybe as I read more, maybe that is the correct interpretation of the true Islam, but a lot of Muslims don't know it.

Darrell Bock: Mmm, interesting. Fikret, any comment on that, on the relative – how can I say it – emphasis between violence and peace-loving in Islam?

I'll just make this personal comment. When we've traveled in Middle Eastern context, in Islamic context, we found the people to be very, very warm and welcoming, and for the most part, delightful to be around. So what comments do you have for us in helping us with this?
I think we need to make the distinction between the followers of Islam and Islam. Followers may vary in their interpretation, but the Islam, the teachings of the Koran and the teachings of the Hadith and some other customs, are very, very clear. I believe that Osama Bin Laden interpreted the Koran and the Hadith the way it should be lived, and they were living it and they were fighting their fight according to their scriptures. But, of course, if you travel through some Muslim countries, you will meet people interpreting things differently. They're more influenced by a Western lifestyle. You'll see it here in Turkey. Or, they don't want Western lifestyle. They want kind of an Islamic lifestyle without any violence. So you can interpret their lifestyle. And does it fit to the teachings of the Koran and the Hadith? I have to say Koran and the Hadith, because most Muslims that we talk to have no idea about the teachings of the Koran. They know about the teachings of the Hadith, some stories, and you know, the lives of some Imams and other Muslims. So according to the volumes and volumes of the teachings of the Hadith and the Koran, it is quite violent against non-Muslims. But, of course, the application today varies.

Now this raises another question that sometimes comes up, and it goes like this. The issue of honesty – I don't know quite how else to raise this. There's this sense that at least some Westerners have, that in certain pockets of Islam at least, there is the ends justifies the means. And so you're free to lie or mislead or deceive on behalf of the Islamic faith if that helps you to advance the Islamic faith. Is that a correct perception or is it misguided?

It is correct; it is absolutely correct. It's part of Jihad, and sometimes we misunderstand what Jihad is. Jihad is not war with weapons, with physical weapons. Jihad is the Islamic missions. But we cannot compare the Islamic missions, the Islamic Jihad with the Christian missions. Use any means possible to convert the infidel. That's a part of Jihad. If that means deception, use deception. If you have to lie, you lie. You can lie to save face. You can lie so you can distract a seeker and get their attention into something else. See, you realize the deception is there, it's in the culture as well. There are many verses in the Koran that teach us that you have to tell the truth. There's a lot of teaching against deception, then we see the practice, again, in the Koran.
Also in even the way Allah gives the verses to Muhammad in a way, deceiving and getting Muhammad's son's wife, for example. It's very deceptive. Muhammad wants it, but Allah kind of accommodates his prophet's desire to get his son's wife. You'll see these kinds of practical deceptive moves.

In Islamic classes here at high schools in Turkey, they'll tell you that you can lie in these three situations. Or, you know, depending on different interpretations, it may be more or less.

And sometimes, you know, growing up in this culture, I've seen – you know, they'll tell you, "Don't lie," but you know – you know, a mother will tell their kids – will train their kids how to lie. And when the kids are lying to mother, the mother knows that the kids are lying, and kids know that the mother knows, but they still continue.

And sometimes, you'll just go out and talk to your friends about your deceptive accomplishments. So it's the understanding of ethics is not like the protestant or the biblical understanding of –

Darrell Bock: So the person who helped to get you arrested, who was deceiving in being a Christian was really about the business of being an informant. Is that basically what was happening?

Fikret Bocek: Yes, yes.

Darrell Bock: Okay. Anna, is your understanding similar to that in terms of background?

Anna: Very similar. As a matter of fact, I experienced myself with one of my brothers who embraced Islam, and he swore by God and told me something, and I believed him – all to discover, it was a lie. When I confronted with the truth, I said, "You lied to me." He said, "Oh. In Islam, that's not considered a lie. I'm trying to protect you so you can become a Muslim. So I'm doing you a favor." So I've experienced that.

And it's so true what he said, Fikret, that it is actually a compliment in Islam to lie in face of different things. A man can lie to his wife just because he wants to win her. There are three things he mentioned – but also, in Jihad said they can lie. Those who understand Islam correctly, they want to see one nation under god, you know, that believes in one god, and Muhammad his prophet. They want to see that come about all over the universe, and they will use whatever method to accomplish that.
The interesting thing that most Muslims may not know that, that they can lie. So as I was growing up, I don't remember having to face, say – oh, people lie in general, but I wasn't taught that growing up when I studied Islam. I learned that later on as I dug deeper into Islam and the teaching that I was taught too. I knew that Muslims could do that. But that wasn't something that I grew up learning from school, from Islamic school.

Darrell Bock: Well our time is up, and I just want to thank both of you for taking the time to visit with us and explaining some aspects of what life is like in an Islamic context. Both of your stories are fascinating. I find myself drawn in wanting to ask you more things. But I think we've helped people understand a little bit about what life can be like in an Islamic context.

I am going to ask one final question to each of you, and it is, is there anything else you'd like to say on this theme that you think people should be aware of in light of some of the things that we've discussed? Fikret?

Fikret Bocek: Yes. We've seen many stubborn Muslims. They look like they will never convert. We happen to be stubborn ourselves with our Scriptures – never go into our feelings, never go into our emotions, our anger, or our perception of things. Our goal should always be to bring these Muslims to the Scriptures.

We can use their Koran. We can tell them that Surah – in Koran, Surah 6:115 say, "None can change his words." Or we can say Surah 10:64, "No change can there be in the words of Allah," and so on, or Surah 6:34 and so on. And just tell them – bring them to an understanding that our Bible is not corrupted.

And our goal should be to bring them to open the first page of the Bible and start praying for them. Pray that God will change them and convert them. And it happens; we've seen many conversions.

Darrell Bock: Because the curiosity about what the scripture says when it's actually read ends up being sufficiently different from what they've heard, that it draws them in oftentimes. Is that not correct?

Fikret Bocek: Yep, absolutely. As they start reading it, something starts happening. They'll oppose it, they'll say things against it, and right there, we begin to hold ourselves and then just start praying for them. And instead of debating, instead of arguing with them, just continue praying for them, and God will start working in their hearts.
Darrell Bock: Anna, any final thoughts you have for us on what we've discussed?

Anna: Yes. I see amazing things the Lord is doing these days. Before, when I used to see a Muslim come to know Jesus, it was like a rare thing. Now, there are just thousands and thousands, and I'm amazed. The Lord is doing something wonderful.

I would just say we are not to be afraid of them. We are to obey the Lord and he gave us the Great Commission. We are to share the Gospel with the lost. We are to entrust our life to the Lord, and continue to love others, share the Gospel with them. Muslims don't know the concept of unconditional love, and as they see it modeled in Christians and offered in forgiveness, it often attracts them.

And I would say, point them to Jesus. They are often attracted by the works of the Lord Jesus, especially when they read in the Gospels and when they read the Sermon on the Mount. They're often amazed, they said, "Oh," because they think of Christianity – somehow they're loose people, there's immorality. And then when they see the beauty of the teaching of the Lord Jesus, and then they encounter Christians living out this truth, it often touches them.

Darrell Bock: Well thank you both very, very much. And we thank you for joining us today on this podcast, which I think has been particularly fascinating in an Islamic context.