



BRANCHES OF ISLAM & MISCONCEPTIONS

Disputed Leadership

After the death of Muhammad, a dispute as to the next leader of Islam broke out

Two groups developed:

- I. Sunnis – followers of Abu Bakr, Muhammad's father-in-law – 800 million
- II. Shiites – followers of Ali, Muhammad's son-in-law – 100 million

SUNNIS

- 90% of Muslims
- Called “Sunni” because they accept the “sunnas,” the oral traditions and interpretations of the Koran after Muhammad’s death
- Usually more liberal than Shiites
- Believe the “caliph” (“successor” of Muhammad) should always be elected, not hereditary
- Believe in Predestination

SHIITE


- 10% of Muslims
- More orthodox and militant than Sunnis
- Mainly in Iran, Iraq, and Palestine
- Created the office of "Imam" = "leader" or "guide"
- Twelve Imams succeeded Ali (last one went into hiding in 940 & will reemerge to rule the world as "Mahdi" = Messiah)
- Believe in hereditary successors

“Arab” and “Muslim” refer to the same people

- Arabs = people who speak Arabic as a native language and identify themselves as Arabs
- Muslims = people who practice the religion of Islam
- Many Arabs are not Muslims, and not all Muslims are Arabs. More than a billion people in the world are Muslims, but fewer than 15 percent of Muslims worldwide are Arabs. The majority of Muslims live outside the Middle East, in places like Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia, India, and Pakistan.
- The confusion between these terms may stem from the fact that Arabic is the primary language of the Islamic faith, just as Latin was for Catholicism until recently. Therefore, all Muslims are expected to know at least a few key words and phrases in the Arabic language.





Islam is fundamentally different from Christianity and Judaism


- Muslims, Christians, and Jews worship the same god. All three are monotheistic religions, with many common doctrines, texts, and beliefs.
 - Muslims respect the same prophets as Jews and Christians, including Abraham, Noah, Moses, and Jesus. In fact, Muslims consider Islam to have existed since Abraham, with Judaism and Christianity being intermediate forms of the final religion revealed to Muhammad.
 - Jews and Christians are specifically protected in the Quran as Peoples of the Book, since Islam considers both the Torah and the New Testament to be revelations from God, though flawed in the process of human transmission.
 - As an example of a difference in interpretation, Muslims do not believe Jesus is the son of God; this acceptance would contradict the Islamic belief in the uniqueness of God's divinity.
 - Like Judaism, Islam has a strong legal tradition that describes the rules by which members of the religious community should live. Some of these rules -- like the dietary restriction against eating pork -- are very similar.
- 




Islam is oppressive toward women

- Islam was a major reform for women and granted them new rights, including the right to agree to their marriage partner, the right to education, and a guaranteed share of family inheritance.
 - Muslim societies, however, may interpret those rights very differently. In most Middle Eastern countries, the law allows women to vote, work outside the home, and even run for office, but -- as is the case in other countries, too -- custom and practice may not always be as liberal as the law allows.
 - Just as it is in the United States, the "proper" role of women is a subject of debate. Some Muslim groups consider a woman's role in the home and family primary and seek to prevent inappropriate behavior -- sexual and otherwise -- by restricting fashion choices or independent access to public life. Others believe women should have equal and independent roles in society, without restriction by the law, family, or custom.
- 

- 
- The seemingly contradictory rights and restrictions for women in some Muslim countries may seem very foreign. In Saudi Arabia, for example, women vote, work, and have excellent access to education, but they must wear a restrictive veil and are prohibited from driving cars.
 - Most of the oppression of women by Islam and Muslims that is highly publicized is usually due to local customs and traditions. Muslim women have been presidents and prime ministers. Violence towards women and forcing them against their will is not permitted by Islam. Care for widows, orphans, and the poor is one of Islam's strongest teachings. Unfortunately, many women are oppressed, However, this is a global issue and not just Islamic oppression. Prevalence of abuse of women is not higher among Muslims than among non-Muslims.



The Middle East is one big desert with lots of camels, men in turbans waving swords, women who cover their faces, and terrorists

- The Middle East and the Islamic world are diverse societies. More Muslims live in fertile plains and fishing villages than in deserts. Clothing and customs for men and women vary enormously in different countries and depend on variables like class, education, political structures, urban vs. rural location, and individual preference.
 - Acts of terrorism are carried out by Islamic militant groups who take the ambiguity of Quranic verses very literally.
- 

All Muslim men marry four wives

- Polygamy is neither mandatory, nor encouraged, but merely permitted. A man is allowed at most four wives only if he can fulfill the stringent conditions of treating each fairly and providing each with separate housing etc.
- Permission to practice polygamy is not associated with mere satisfaction of passion. It is rather associated with compassion toward widows and orphans. It was the Quran that limited and put conditions on the practice of polygamy among the Arabs, who had as many as ten or more wives and considered them "property".
- It is both honest and accurate to say that it is Islam that regulated this practice, limited it, made it more humane, and instituted equal rights and status for all wives.
- The general rule in Islam is monogamy and not polygamy. It is a very tiny percentage of Muslims that practice it over the world. However, permission to practice limited polygamy is only consistent with Islam's realistic view of the nature of man and woman and of various social needs, problems and cultural variations.

Islam is violent

- Most Muslims condemn violence as much as any non-Muslim and resent being presumed violent on the basis of a shared religion. Muslims often ask, "Did Timothy McVeigh's bombing of a federal building in Oklahoma City mean *all* Christians are terrorists?"
- News stories about "Islamic terrorism" often imply that Islam upholds the idea of jihad as a holy war fought against nonbelievers. For most Muslims, the most important meaning of "jihad" is intensely personal; it is the internal struggle to be a moral person. "Jihad" can also refer to the struggle for social justice or the defense of the Islamic community against outside attack.
- The vast majority of Muslims are moderate, pious people who suffer more from terrorism and violence than non-Muslims. Ninety-three percent of Muslims do not support extremist views of terrorism.