

# Did you know?

The word “Qur’an” (or Koran) means “the recitation,” and its text is meant to be recited out loud. It is not meant to be read silently, from cover to cover. One indication of this is the fact that the work as a whole is not arranged thematically or chronologically, but rather its 114 chapters (called suras) are largely arranged by their length, from the longest suras near the beginning of the written text of the Qur’an to the shortest ones near its end. The verses (called ayas) within each sura rhyme at the end, which adds to the beauty of the recitation and helps with memorization.

Only a minority of Muslims in the world are Arabs (1 in 5), and most don’t even read Arabic. The majority of Muslims memorize just enough of the Qur’an in Arabic to recite their daily ritual prayers (salat).

Muhammad is only alluded to a few times in the Qur’an. The figure that the Qur’an mentions most frequently, in fact, is Moses! Many stories about Moses familiar to Jews and Christians from their sacred scripture also appear in the Qur’an,—from his being placed in the river and adopted by Pharaoh’s family after his birth, to his encounters with God at the burning bush and on Mount Sinai. The Qur’an also contains stories about Moses not found in the Bible, such as his journeys with a mysterious righteous man of God popularly known as al-Khidr.

Several biblical figures have chapters of the Qur’an named after them, including Joseph, Jonah, Noah, and Mary, mother of Jesus. The Qur’an, in fact, gives a more detailed account of the life of Mary than any of the narratives appearing in the Christian New Testament. The Qur’an states that Jesus is not the son of God but simply a human prophet (like Adam, Abraham, Noah, Joseph, Moses, and Muhammad). Nevertheless, it also gives Jesus special titles like “Messiah” (al-masih), God’s “Word” (kalimatuhu) and “a Spirit from Him” (ruh minhu).

There have been modern female heads of state in several Muslim majority countries, including Pakistan, Indonesia, Bangladesh, Kosovo, and Turkey.

Many common English words originally derive from Arabic, including cotton, giraffe, alcohol, lute, check, sofa, algebra, chemistry, coffee, lime, sequin, cipher, the Milky Way, chess, gazelle, saffron, safari, and zenith.

Islam continues to be one of the fastest growing religions in the U.S., where the number of Muslims surpasses the number of Buddhists and Hindus, as well as many Protestant denominations of Christianity. Muslims currently make up about 1% of the U.S. population and are one of the most racially diverse religious groups in all of the U.S. The largest single ethnic group of Muslims in the U.S. are South Asians, closely followed by African Americans.

The largest Muslim-majority country in the world is Indonesia. The region of the world containing the most Muslims is South Asia (encompasses India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh).

There are two Muslim members of the U.S. Congress: Keith Ellison (Minnesota) and Andre Carson (Indiana).

According to the Pentagon, as of 2016 approximately 6,000 Muslims serve in the different branches of the U.S. military. Muslims have served in the U.S. military fighting for this country in every one of its major conflicts, including the Revolutionary War, the Civil War, World War I, World War II, the Vietnam War, the first Gulf War, and other wars in the Middle East and Central Asia since 9/11/2001.

Around 15% of the slaves brought to the U.S. from Africa were Muslims (some scholars place the estimate as high as 30%). African American Muslims make up about a quarter of the Muslim population of the United States.

The first country of the world to recognize the independent sovereignty of the United States, which happened in 1777, was a Muslim-majority country, Morocco.

Illustrations accompanying the written text of the Qur’an date back to some of the very earliest Qur’an fragments discovered in Yemen. It would be extremely rare in the premodern context, however, to find a text of the Qur’an that would include illustrations of people or animals. Contrary to popular opinion, Muslims historically did in fact paint pictures of people, including images of the Prophet Muhammad, but such paintings generally did not appear in Qur’ans or in houses of worship (mosques). The reason for keeping images out of such sacred sites is so that images would not be mistaken as objects of worship in and of themselves.

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