

# TEMPLETON PRIZE



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## Fact Sheet – His Majesty King Abdullah II

**30 January 1962:** Abdullah II ibn Al Hussein born in Amman, Jordan, the eldest son of King Hussein bin Talal (d. 1999) and Princess Muna Al Hussein. Named Crown Prince of Jordan shortly after his birth, although in 1965 this is changed to Prince El Hassan bin Talal, his uncle, due to regional instability.

A member of the Hashemites, the royal family of Jordan, he is a 41st generation direct descendant of the Prophet Mohammad, peace and blessings be upon him. The family ruled the holy cities of Mecca and Medina since the 10th century until 1925. His great-great-grandfather, Sharif Hussein bin Ali, Sharif of Mecca and King of the Arabs, led the Great Arab Revolt against the Ottoman rule of the Turkish Committee of Union and Progress, from 1916 to 1918, with the aim of achieving independence.

The Hashemite family has ruled Jordan since 1921 when it was founded as the Emirate of Transjordan. It became the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan upon formal independence from Great Britain in 1946. He is the namesake of his great-grandfather, King Abdullah, who ruled Jordan from its inception until his assassination at Al Aqsa Mosque/Al Haram Al Sharif in Jerusalem in 1951. After the abdication of his grandfather, King Talal, his father, King Hussein, ruled Jordan from 1952 until his death in 1999. The Hashemite dynasty is the oldest in the Islamic world, and, except for the Imperial House of Japan, the oldest in the world.

**1966-1973:** Receives elementary education at the Islamic Educational College in Amman and at St. Edmund's School in Surrey, England.

**1973-1980:** Completes his secondary education at Eaglebrook School and at Deerfield Academy, both in Deerfield, Massachusetts, USA.

**1980-1981:** Like his father before him, enrolls at the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst, England. Following graduation, commissioned as a Second Lieutenant in the British Army, and appointed commander of a scouting company in the 13th/18th battalion of the British Royal Hussars.

**1982:** Completes a one-year special studies course on Middle East affairs and international politics at Pembroke College, Oxford.

**1983-1986:** Returns to Jordan and enlists in the Jordan Armed Forces-Arab Army with the rank of First Lieutenant; subsequently serves as platoon commander and assistant commander in the 40th Armoured Brigade. Attends an advanced armor course at Fort Knox, Kentucky, USA. Becomes Commander of a tank company in the 91st Armoured Brigade of the Jordan Armed Forces-Arab Army with the rank of Captain. Obtains qualification as a paratrooper and as a Cobra attack helicopter pilot, and serves in the anti-tank helicopter wing in the Royal Jordanian Air Force.

**1987:** Attends the School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University in Washington, DC, and undertakes advanced study and research in International Affairs within the framework of the master's program in Foreign Service. Starts international royal duties by accompanying King Hussein to Moscow for talks with USSR President Andrei Gromyko.

**1989:** Named Assistant Commander in the 17th Royal Tank Battalion; promoted to rank of Major.

**1991:** Represents the Armoured Corp at the Office of the Inspector General of the Jordan Armed Forces-Arab Army and leads the Second Royal Armoured Battalion.

**1991-1995:** Leads several Jordanian delegations to Asian countries including Taiwan (1991), China, Japan, Singapore, and North Korea (1993), and Malaysia (1995).

**1993:** Meets Rania Al Yassin (b. 1970). They are engaged two months later and marry in June.

They will have four children: Al Hussein (b. 1994), now Crown Prince of Jordan; Princess Iman bint Abdullah II (b. 1996); Princess Salma bint Abdullah II (b. 2000); and Prince Hashem bin Abdullah II (b. 2005). Queen Rania Al Abdullah ranks as the 34th most influential Muslim, and the highest-ranked woman, according to the 2018 edition of *The Muslim 500*, published by the Royal Islamic Strategic Studies Centre.

**1993-1994:** Promoted to Colonel and becomes Commander of the 40th Armoured Brigade; then named Commander of the Royal Jordanian Special Forces with the rank of Brigadier General.

**1996:** Restructures the Royal Jordanian Special Forces into elite units, creating the Special Operations Command.

**1997:** Made Commander of the Special Operations Command.

**1998:** Promoted to Major General. Attends US Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, California.

**29 January 1999:** King Hussein re-appoints him as Crown Prince of Jordan.

**7 February 1999:** King Hussein dies after a long battle with non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. He assumes constitutional powers as King, and an official ceremony marking his accession to the Throne is held on June 9.

**1999:** Begins his ongoing sponsorship of the Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought in Amman, an international, non-governmental institute originally established by King Hussein in 1980. It promotes Islam and Islamic scholarship through symposia, conferences, research papers, and an authoritative website with the aim of fostering cooperation and religious awareness and rectifying misunderstandings of Islam that feed extremism and fear. It also hosts the largest and most successful websites for Quranic Commentary ([www.altafsir.com](http://www.altafsir.com)) and Prophetic Sirah ([www.alsirah.com](http://www.alsirah.com)).

Launches a National Park at the Baptism Site of Jesus Christ on the East Bank of the Jordan River, after it was initially rediscovered in 1995.

**2001:** Jordan condemns the September 11 attacks and responds favorably to US requests for assistance. He emerges as an influential and moderating force in the region, stressing in multilateral venues the need to combat terrorism cooperatively.

**2002:** Meets in Amman with US Vice President Dick Cheney during his tour to the Middle East to gather support for a US attack on Iraq. He warns Cheney that such action could seriously destabilize the region.

**2003:** Following the US invasion of Iraq, Jordan saw an influx of Iraqi refugees. By 2007, reports estimate that Jordan hosted 800,000 Iraqi refugees following the US invasion, although most had returned to Iraq by the time of a 2015 census.

**2004:** In response to an increase in Islamophobic rhetoric following the 2003 US invasion of Iraq, launches the [Amman Message](#) in November, an attempt to seek a broad declaration of tolerance and unity among various schools of Islamic thought and to define the universal core values of Islam.

**2005:** In order to strengthen the religious authority of the Amman Message, seeks responses to three questions from 24 senior religious scholars from all schools and branches of Islam around the world:

1. Who is a Muslim?
2. Is it permissible to declare someone an apostate (*takfir*)?
3. Who has the right to undertake issuing legal rulings (*fatwas*)?

In July, convenes a conference in Amman attended by 200 leading Islamic scholars from 50 countries. They issue a unanimous ruling on three issues, to become known as the "[Three Points of the Amman Message](#)":

1. They specifically recognized the validity of all 8 *Mathahib* (legal schools) of *Sunni*, *Shi'a* and *Ibadhi* Islam; of traditional Islamic Theology (*Ash'arism*); of Islamic Mysticism (Sufism); and of true *Salafi* thought, and came to a precise definition of who is a Muslim.
2. Based on this definition, they forbade *takfir* (declarations of apostasy) between Muslims.
3. Based upon the *Mathahib* (legal schools) they set forth the subjective and objective preconditions for the issuing of *fatwas*, thereby exposing ignorant and illegitimate edicts in the name of Islam.

In December, the Three Points are unanimously adopted by the Organization of Islamic Cooperation summit in Mecca, and, over the next year, by six other international Islamic scholarly assemblies. More than 450 Islamic scholars and institutes from more than [50 countries worldwide have endorsed](#) the Amman Message and its Three Points.

According to the [Amman Message website](#), "this amounts to a historical, universal and unanimous religious and political consensus (*ijma'*) of the *Ummah* (nation) of Islam in our day... the first time in over a thousand years that the *Ummah* has formally and specifically come to such a pluralistic mutual inter-recognition."

**2006:** Supports and funds the "[A Common Word Between Us and You](#)" initiative, an open letter dated 13 October 2007 from Islamic religious leaders to Christian religious leaders calling for peace and harmony between Muslims and Christians worldwide. It calls for cooperation based on the twin commandments shared by Islam (in the Qur'an) and Christianity (in the Bible) of "love of God" and "love of the neighbour." It follows a shorter 2006 letter in response to Pope Benedict XVI's lecture at the University of Regensburg, which had sparked international controversy among Muslims and others for its perceived insensitivity and mischaracterization of Islam. "A Common Word," originally signed by [138 Muslim leaders and scholars](#) from 52 countries, was addressed to the Pope, the Patriarchs of the Orthodox Churches, and the Archbishops and Moderators of the Protestant Churches. It now has more than [400 signatories](#), including [nearly 300 endorsements](#) from a wide range of Christian leaders. It is considered by many to be the most important Muslim theological initiative ever taken towards Christians.

**2007:** In recognition of his education at Deerfield Academy, establishes King's Academy, the Middle East's first co-educational boarding school, in Madaba, southwest of Amman.

**2008:** Establishes the World Islamic Sciences and Education University in Amman to crystallize his vision of a moderate and modern, compassionate, and peaceful approach to religion.

Becomes the first Arab head of state to visit Iraq following the 2003 American invasion.

**2010:** Proposes a [World Interfaith Harmony Week](#) at the 65th meeting of the United Nations General Assembly in September, stressing the moral imperative of promoting and understanding the values of peace inherent in all religions, and drawing upon the 2007 "A Common Word" initiative. One month later, a proposal sponsored by Jordan and 29 other nations is adopted unanimously as [Resolution A/Res/65/5](#) establishing the first week of February as World Interfaith Harmony Week. While "A Common Word" calls for interfaith harmony based on the twin commandments of loving God and loving one's neighbour as common and fundamental to all three Monotheistic religions, the UN resolution expands the language of the commandments by adding "Love of the Good, and Love of the Neighbour" to include all people of goodwill, with or without faith. The resolution, among other goals:

1. Reaffirms that mutual understanding and interreligious dialogue constitute important dimensions of a culture of peace;
2. Proclaims the first week of February of every year the World Interfaith Harmony Week between all religions, faiths and beliefs; and
3. Encourages all States to support, on a voluntary basis, the spread of the message of interfaith harmony and goodwill in the world's churches, mosques, synagogues, temples and other places of worship during that week, based on love of God and love of one's neighbour or on love of the good and love of one's neighbour, each according to their own religious traditions or convictions.

Thousands of events by interfaith and other groups around the world annually during the week are shared through the [initiative's website](#). It is generally acknowledged as the first and only time that the United Nations has approved a resolution that refers explicitly to belief in God.

Since 2013, the King Abdullah II World Interfaith Harmony Week Prize has been awarded to each of the three best events or texts from around the world that are organized or produced to mark the World Interfaith Harmony Week, and which best promote its goals.

**2010-2013:** Jordan avoids the major upheavals of the so-called Arab Spring period which witnessed the toppling of regimes in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Yemen, civil war in Syria, and civil disorder in many other countries. Protests in Jordan are largely focused on calls for an improved economy and political reforms. King Abdullah II champions wide-ranging constitutional, legislative, and administrative reforms, with the goal of advancing democracy, and empowering Parliament and the Judiciary.

**2011:** Massive numbers of refugees begin fleeing to Jordan after the outbreak of the Syrian Civil War, up to 2,000 to 3,000 per day during some periods early in the conflict. A January 2013 report estimates more than 300,000 Syrians living in Jordan. According to the Jordan Response Plan for the Syria Crisis (2017 – 2019), Jordan hosts around 1.3 million Syrians, constituting nearly 20% of the Jordanian population and causing considerable socioeconomic pressure.

His autobiography, *Our Last Best Chance: The Pursuit of Peace in a Time of Peril*, published in Arabic by Al Saqi and in English by Viking Press.

**2012:** Creates integrated professorial chairs for the study of Muslim thinkers at Al Aqsa Mosque/Al Haram Al Sharif in Jerusalem and the King Hussein Mosque in Amman.

**2013:** President Mahmoud Abbas of the State of Palestine and King Abdullah II sign a formal treaty that reaffirms King Abdullah II as the Custodian of Muslim and Christian holy sites in Jerusalem, reaffirming the role of the Hashemites as Custodians since 1924. The sites include Al Aqsa Mosque/Al Haram Al Sharif, one of Islam's three holiest sites, and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, the presumed site of the crucifixion and tomb of Jesus and the headquarters of the Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem. The Church was included in the treaty at the specific request of the Orthodox Patriarch of Jerusalem, Theophilos III. The 1994 Jordanian-Israeli Peace Treaty also recognizes the special role of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan in Muslim holy shrines in Jerusalem. Thus, while ISIS (Daesh) has destroyed many historical and archaeological treasures, King Abdullah II protects Muslim and Christian holy sites as universal historical treasures.

Convenes a conference in Amman on "The Challenges Facing Arab Christians" attended by some 70 Muslim and Christian leaders from throughout the Middle East and other Western countries, and accepts all Christian refugees from Syria and Iraq into Jordan without visas, thereby saving much of their population.

**2014:** Receives Pope Francis in Jordan (the fourth papal visit to Jordan and third during his reign) and, with Queen Rania, accompanies the Pope to Al Maghtas (Bethany beyond the Jordan), considered to be the Baptism Site of Jesus Christ, on the East Bank of the Jordan River.

Establishes a fellowship for the study of love in religion at Regent's Park College, Oxford, in a collaborative effort with the Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought.

**2015:** After pushing for legislation to restore and develop Al Maghtas, the Baptism Site of Jesus Christ, UNESCO unanimously approves its designation as a World Heritage Site. Blocks of land are granted to various denominations to build churches on the site, and a conference centre was opened in 2012.

Addresses the European Parliament in Strasbourg, France, stressing the true values of Islam, the need for meaningful interfaith outreach, and Europe's importance as a partner to stop the global rise of Islamophobia.

**2016:** Issues a Royal Benefaction to provide for the restoration of what is considered Jesus' Tomb in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, which had been untouched since 1947 when the British installed support beams for a restoration project that never occurred. He provides the funds at his sole personal expense. The Church re-opens to the public in 2017.

Named the world's #1 most influential Muslim in *The Muslim 500*.

Awarded the Peace of Westphalia Prize, in recognition of his endeavors for peace and international security and stability.

**2017:** Donates \$1.4 million to the Jordan-based Waqf Islamic Trust, administrators of Al Aqsa Mosque/Al Haram Al Sharif.

Receives the Nazarbayev International Prize for Contributions to Nuclear Disarmament and Security, in appreciation of his efforts to bring security and stability to the region and the world.

**2018:** As Custodian of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and out of his commitment to protecting Christian communities in the region, continues to defend Christian historic rights and freedom of worship amidst attempts to encroach on church property in Jerusalem. In appreciation of these efforts, receives [a letter from the Orthodox Patriarch of Jerusalem, Theophilos III](#), on behalf of himself, the patriarchs and heads of the churches in Jerusalem, and the Council of Churches in Jordan, recognizing the help and support provided to the Christian communities in the region.

Awarded the Templeton Prize.

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