

The Quran and its Message

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سَلَامٌ عَلَيْكُمْ

Salamun Alaikum (Peace be upon you)

ABROGATION - A FALSE DOCTRINE

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The principle of 'abrogation' (Arabic: nasakh) claims that some verses of the Quran are in effect abrogated, superseded and replaced by other verses of the Quran and Prophetic traditions. This is arguably one of the most dangerous, highly controversial and baseless assertion against the Divine scripture of God.

Not only does this fanciful assertion conjure up an image of a human author attempting to correct and edit various drafts of his manuscripts, to suit ever changing circumstances and correcting mistakes, a deeper analysis of the Quran reveals, that this a doctrine that is completely unfounded and cannot be supported by the Quran itself.

039:023 (Part)

"God has revealed the best message in the form of a Book, its parts consistent with itself, (yet) repeating (its teaching in various aspects)..."

025.032

"And those who disbelieve say: Why is the Quran not revealed to him all at once? (It is revealed) thus that We may strengthen thy heart there with; and We have arranged it in right order (Arabic: rattalnahu tartilan)"

The phrase 'Rattalnahu tartilan' clearly denotes the well constructed action of putting together of component parts into one integral whole, endowing the complete scripture, with an 'airtight' inner consistency devoid of errors.

A comprehensive expose of the subject of 'abrogation' is beyond the ambit of this relatively short article, which, serves only to introduce the reader to this ill-conceived doctrine and briefly discusses some of its principle areas of weakness.

What seems to lie at the core of the doctrine of abrogation is the clear inability of certain early classical scholars to reconcile certain passages of the Quran with others. Later scholars that rely on earlier interpretations and traditions captured within [Islamic Secondary Sources](#) without critique, only accentuate the problem by passing on the 'baggage of confusion' to later theologians.

There is not **one** single agreed list, or, any one consensus between jurists, of what verses lie at the core of this 'alleged' Quranic abrogation. Some early authorities such as Ibn Shihab al-Zuhri (d.741-2) claimed there were 42 verses that remained affected by abrogation. By the 11th century, Ibn Salama and al-Farisi had by now claimed well over 200 verses that had been abrogated. Some later scholars, such as Shah Wali Ullah (d. 1762), believed the number to be in single digits. The arbitrary nature of the claims behind abrogation also explains why there exists no unanimity whatsoever in Muslim thought, with regards what verses are abrogated and how many.

There is not one passage of the Quran, that I have found in my sustained work with the Quran for numerous years, that cannot be reconciled if the Quran itself is allowed to be the core source of its interpretation, context and meaning. My intention is not to go through each possible claim but to holistically capture the weakness of this ill-formed doctrine.

A MISUNDERSTOOD VERSE

002.106

"Any verse / message (**Arabic: ayatın**) which, We cancel / abrogate or consign to oblivion We replace with a better or a similar one. Do you not know that God has the power to will anything?"

The interpretation that requires one to accept that by virtue of the above verse the doctrine of abrogation is established is completely erroneous. If the above verse is read within the context of previous verses, which is clearly a dialogue with the Jews and Christians, the context is established.

Furthermore, it becomes apparent that the 'message' (**Arabic: Ayatin**) referred to above, is only a reference to the dispensation of certain directives of **previous scriptures**, which also belong to God and **do not** refer to the Quran. What lies at the heart of this misinterpretation, is not only a divorce from context, but also an unnecessary restriction on the word 'Ayah' which has multifarious meanings even in the Quran.

Ayat not only refers to a verse of the Quran, but also, a sign, a mark, indication, message, evidence, a miracle, proof or communication. Context is key to understand the term's best application.

There are many other examples. Let us note some.

SOME EXAMPLES

[Readers are advised to consult their own Quran translations for the verses in question below].

If the often quoted verse 9:5 is read with previous verses, it is clear that it specifically relates to a conflict that is already ensuing and is specific to treaty breakers. Therefore, the overarching doctrine of fighting in defence, with no aggression established in 2:190-94, is not abrogated.

Similarly, there is no conflict between 4:15 and 24:2, which deal with completely different offences. Whereas the offence in 4:15 could be an ill, which affects the wider society (such as prostitution),

the offence in 24:2, is simply restricted to personal immorality, such as adultery or fornication and applies to **both** genders. The offence by males in 4:16 could easily be a reference to homosexuality, which is left to the society to punish based on the circumstances. The elaboration of 4:16, 'If they repent and amend, leave them alone' (Arabic: fa'in taba wa-aslahu fa-a'ridu anhuma) could also be clearly connected to 4:15 where the words 'or God appoints for them another way' have been utilised.

To connect 'God appoints another way' to 24:2 as a basis for new legislation (and implying abrogation of 4:15) is an unwarranted connection, as these are dealing with completely different offences.

Furthermore, neither does 3:85 or 9:33 abrogate verses which support the practices of the Christians or the Jews (People of the Book), as they are still monotheistic religions **and are not** 'false religions' from the Quranic perspective. All Prophets of God including Prophets Moses and Jesus, ^(pbuh) were inspired with the same 'deen' of Islam (religion) as Prophet Muhammad. ^(pbuh) Therefore, to imply otherwise, is unsupportable from a Quranic perspective.

042:013

"He has ordained for you the **same religion (Arabic: dini)** that which He enjoined on Noah and that which We have sent to you by inspiration and that which We enjoined on Abraham, Moses, and Jesus: Namely, to establish religion, and make no divisions in it. To those who worship other things than God, hard is the (way) to which you call them. God chooses to Himself those whom He pleases, and guides to Himself those who turn (to Him)"

There are numerous other 'alleged' abrogated verses. However, the fundamental requirement for seeking appropriate reconciliation from the Quranic text itself should be clear from some of the examples cited above.

FINAL THOUGHTS

From a Quran's perspective, the belief that certain Quranic verses have been abrogated is unsupportable and remains a false doctrine.

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