

[Home](#) > [Sciences of the Qur'an \("Uloom al-Qur'an"\)](#) > [Lesson 8: The Science of Abrogation](#) > The Only Abrogated Ayah in the Qur'an

Lesson 8: The Science of Abrogation

Introduction

The science of the abrogation of the Qur'an is undoubtedly one of the most significant sciences of the Qur'an. It is the only science of the Qur'an about which many books have been compiled. Ibn al-Nadeem (died in 380 or 385 A.H) in his book 'al-Fihrest' (the Index) has named 18 books that were compiled up to his time.

Amongst many books that are compiled on this subject the book of 'al-Nasikh and al-Mansoukh' written by Ibn Hazm died in 320 A.H. is the oldest book that is available. Among the contemporary scholars Dr. Mustapha Zaid has compiled a very useful book entitled 'al-Naskh Fil-Qur'an' (Abrogation in the Qur'an).

The science of the abrogation of the Qur'an is one of the discussions in Usulul-Fiqh (the Principles of Jurisprudence). The jurists have paid special attention to this science for the abrogation – as we shall learn– applies only on the jurisprudential Ayaat of the Qur'an. Thus, understanding the Ayaat, the abrogated and the abrogating Ayaat are essential in jurisprudential deduction.

Significance

The significance of understanding the abrogation is emphasised in many narrations. Imam Ali (a.s) entered a mosque wherein a man was preaching and warning people about the hereafter. The Imam asked who the man was. He is just reminding people about God, replied one of the audiences. The Imam said: "He is not a preacher. He is a selfish man whose intention is to introduce himself." The man was brought to the Imam. He asked the man: "Can you distinguish the abrogating Ayaat from the abrogated one?", "No", replied the man. The Imam said: "Then step out of our mosque and do not preach here."

Al-Shaikh al-Sadooq narrated in his 'Elalu-Sharaye' that Imam Sadiq (a.s) asked Abu-Hanifah: Are you

the jurist of the people of Iraq? Yes, he replied. The Imam asked: on which basis do you issue your verdict? On the basis of the Qur'an and the tradition of the Prophet (S), replied Abu-Hanifah. The Imam added: Can you distinguish the abrogating from the abrogated ones? Yes, replied Abu-Hanifah. The Imam said: You have claimed a vast knowledge.

Definition

Naskh literally means to abolish, to annul, to change or replace something with something else by authority. Thus, Naskh is an official or legal abrogation and cancellation of an order.

In the Shari'a law (Islamic canon law) when a law is cancelled and replaced with another law the cancelled law is called 'Mansookh' (abrogated) and the new law is called 'Nasekh' (abrogating) and the action is called 'Naskh' (abrogation); naskh in jurisprudential law is similar to al-Bada' (changeable decree) in the creation.

We must however bear in mind that the expression of 'abrogation' in Ahadeeth as well as the words of the early scholars would include 'general and specific' 'absolute and limited' and even 'if clause'. It is due to this expression that the number of the abrogated Ayaat was much more in the eyes of the early scholars than the contemporary ones. For instance, the Almighty Allah states: ***"And divorced women shall wait (as regard to their marriage) for three menstrual periods" (2:228).***

On the other hand, in an authentic Hadith it is narrated that should a man divorce his wife prior to consummation of their marriage she does not need to wait for three menstrual periods before her remarriage.

The early scholars would consider the above example an abrogation of the Ayah by Hadith whereas the Ayah in fact is not abrogated. The general rule of the Ayah is limited by the Hadith to situations that marriage is consummated.

The Wisdom of Abrogation

Seeking perfecting and improvement is instinctive in man. Once upon a time travelling by horse or camel would be considered the best means of travelling. With the invention of the automobile travelling by horse was abrogated. Similarly, invention of the airplane abrogated land travelling especially for long trips. Abrogation is therefore a continuous phenomenon in human technology.

The same phenomenon is observed in human social laws. Every day we hear a new legislation abrogating the previous one. Abrogation is inevitable in human laws for the purpose of improving the law.

The wisdom behind abrogation in religious laws is similar to civil laws. The religious laws are also ordained to improve man's physical and spiritual life and to elevate him to his eternal prosperity. As

man's improvement is naturally a gradual process the laws that are to be prescribed for him shall also be gradual. Thus, the Almighty has sent various prophets throughout history to gradually educate mankind at various stages of his life with required laws.

Educating of man about divine laws is similar to teaching mathematics to students. As the pupil grows mentally he will be taught more mathematical concepts. Thus, when a teacher teaches the second grade of mathematics it does not mean that he has changed his mind about the mathematic concepts taught in grade one. Abrogation in the Islamic laws is similar to different prescriptions of a skilful and kind physician who is treating his patients in a gradual fashion– to minimise the side effects– with different prescriptions.

The difference however, between abrogation in the civil law and that of the religious law is that man in the civil law discovers more advanced laws and hence changes his mind about the previous law whereas, in divine law the Almighty God is all knowing about all matters and the changes of the law are due to man's different requirements in different times. The Almighty Allah states:

"And when We change an Ayah in place of another – and Allah knows best what He sends down – they say: You are but a liar, nay but most of them know not. (16: 101)

Say Gabriel has brought it down from your Lord with truth that it may make firm and strengthen those who believe and as a guidance and glad tidings to those who have submitted. "(16: 102)

Possibility of Abrogation in the Qur'an

Is there any abrogation in the Qur'an? Is it possible that there are two Ayahs in the Qur'an where one is abrogating the other?

Undoubtedly, some of the Ayaat of the Qur'an confirm the possibility of abrogation if not its occurrence in the Qur'an the following are the main references in the Qur'an with regards to its abrogation:

"Whatever an Ayah do We abrogate or cause to be forgotten (or to be delayed) We bring a better one or similar to it. Know you not that Allah is able to do all things? "(2: 106)

"And when We change an Ayah in place of another – and Allah knows best what He sends down – they say: You are but a liar, nay but most of them know not. (16: 101)

Say Gabriel has brought it down from your Lord with truth that it may make firm and strengthen those who believe and as a guidance and glad tidings to those who have submitted. "(16: 102)

"Allah blots out what He wills and confirms (what He wills). And with Him is the Source of the Book. (13:39)

The above Ayaat in general confirm the occurrence of abrogation in the Islamic laws. However, whether

they mean the abrogation of the previous religious laws after the advent of Islam as it seems to be the meaning of the first Ayah or it is the abrogation of the Qur'an with another Ayah as it is the apparent meaning of the second Ayah, or it is abrogation in general as it seems in the third Ayah, all are issues that need further investigation.

Another possibility is to suggest that the meaning of the "Ayah" at least in the first one could be literal which means a sign or a guide or it could mean miracle. The advantage of this possibility is that in regards to some of the Ayaat such as the one for changing the direction of the Qibla (2:150) we do not need to falsely believe that the abrogated law (with regards to praying towards Jerusalem) has been an Ayah in the Qur'an and its recitation and rule has been abrogated, for we don't believe in the abrogation of recitation.

Conditions of Abrogation

In order for us to consider a law abrogated by another, any of the following five conditions must be met:

There must be a real contradiction between the two rules, for instance if an Ayah of the Qur'an says to do something and another one is asking not to do it then either of them is abrogated and another one is abrogating. The best example of this type of abrogation is Ayah 12 and 13 of Surah 58. It is due to the lack of this condition that the recommended law of giving charity is not abrogated by the law of compulsory Zakat. For, Muslims are ordered to give both the recommended charity well as paying Zakat. Thus, revelation of the Ayah of the obligation of Zakat (9:60) does not abrogate the many Ayaat that are encouraging Muslims to pay charity for the cause of God for, there is no real contradiction between them.

The disagreement between the two laws must be in all aspects not partially or in some aspects, therefore Ayah 31 of Surah 24 in which Muslim women are ordered to abide by the Islamic dress code is not abrogated with Ayah 60 of the same Surah in which the law of Islamic dress code is lenient about aged women. For Ayah 31 is general about all women whether young or old and Ayah 60 is specifically about aged women. In other words, Ayah 60 should be considered an interpretation of Ayah 31 to indicate that the latter does not include the aged women. Although, early scholars would refer to such phenomenon as abrogation it is no longer considered an abrogation.

The first law must not be temporary otherwise when the date expires the law naturally ends not that it is abrogated. Therefore, Ayah 15 of Surah 4 is not abrogated by the law of stoning for the law of the Ayah was temporary from the beginning as Allah says in that Ayah "Or Allah ordains for them some other way".

The subject of the two laws must be the same for instance, drinking intoxicants is forbidden but in the advent of an emergency– such as for medication– if the medication is limited to that one or if the person is threatened – in the advent of an emergency it is permissible. Therefore, the last part of Ayah 173 of

Surah 2 is not abrogating the first part of it as claimed by the abrogation lovers.

The abrogation only applies in the jurisprudential laws not in the advents of the external world, thus Ayah 13 of Surah 56 is not abrogating its Ayah 39 for they are talking about two different groups of people of paradise.

With consideration of the above five conditions we acknowledge that abrogation does not have many examples in the Qur'an. The number of the abrogated Ayaat in the view of the scholars depends on the number of the conditions that they agree upon for abrogation.

Types of Abrogation

The Sunni scholars have presumed three different types of abrogation in the Qur'an. Although we totally disagree with the first two types for educational purposes we shall discuss all of them.

Abrogation of rule and recitation: abrogation of rule and recitation means that an Ayah of the Qur'an is allegedly deleted along with its rule. Sunni scholars cite the following narration for this type of abrogation. Aisha said "Among what was revealed was the law of ten times confirmed breastfeeding which was abrogated by five times confirmed breastfeeding. When the Messenger of God passed away the abrogating Ayah (five times breastfeeding) was still recited in the Qur'an".

According to the Sunnis there has been an Ayah in the Qur'an indicating the law of being mahram to someone by ten times confirmed breastfeeding which the Ayah and its rule are all abrogated. This is despite the fact that there is no Ayah in the Qur'an indicating the number of breastfeeding whether five times or ten times, thus the Sunni scholars claim that the ten times breastfeeding is abrogated by the tradition.

The problem of this type of abrogation is that it leads to the false claim of distortion of the Qur'an on the one hand as well as the false claim of abrogation after the demise of the Prophet (S). For, surely no law can be abrogated after the demise of the Prophet (S).

Abrogation of recitation but not the law: by this type of abrogation the Sunni scholars mean that an Ayah of the Qur'an is allegedly deleted but its rule is in order. The famous example of this type of abrogation for them is Ayah Rajm as discussed in meeting five. We believe the abrogation of recitation is void for it is nothing other than the false claim of distortion of the Qur'an.

Abrogation of the rule without the recitation: the meaning of this type of abrogation is that the rule of an Ayah of the Qur'an is abrogated although the Ayah itself exists in the Qur'an most of the examples of abrogation are in fact this type of it. In general, Muslim scholars are unanimous that this type of abrogation has occurred in the Qur'an although they disagree about the number of abrogated Ayaat and its examples.

Abrogation of the rule without recitation can occur in one of the three following ways:

3/1: Abrogation of the Qur'an by the Qur'an that means an Ayah of the Qur'an is abrogating another Ayah such as Ayah 13 of Surah 58, that it's abrogating its previous Ayah

3/2: Abrogation of the Qur'an by a narration that is repeatedly narrated. For the example of this type of narration it is claimed that the rule of Stoning which is repeatedly narrated from the Prophet (S) has abrogated Ayah 2 of Surah 24. However, we believe that Ayah 2 of Surah 24 is generally talking about the law of Adultery, which the adulterer and the adulteress ought to be whipped one hundred times if the crime is proven in the Islamic court. The Ayah is silent about whether the rule applies to a married person or a single person whereas the rule of Stoning applies only to the married adulterers whether male or female. Thus, they lack the second condition of the conditions of abrogation.

Similarly, it is claimed that the third Ayah of Surah 24 is abrogated with permissibility– though not recommended– of temporary marriage with an adulteress. However, this is firstly another example of specifying a general rule and secondly we disagree with the specification. Further discussion has to be sought in jurisprudence.

In general, abrogation of the Qur'an by a Prophetic narration that is repeatedly narrated is Islamically possible for the Messenger of Allah does not speak by his desire. However, it is very unlikely that such abrogation has occurred in the Qur'an.

3/3: Abrogation of the Qur'an by a Single narration: this type of abrogation is not permissible as the validity of a Single narration is not the same as the Qur'an.

Number of the Abrogated Ayaat

The scholars have different opinions on the number of abrogated Ayaat. The early scholars were counting the abrogated Ayaat to be up to five hundred. The reason for this big figure was their inclusive interpretation of the term abrogation as mentioned earlier.

The contemporary scholars also disagree about the number of the abrogated Ayaat. Souti asserts that the abrogated Ayaat in the Qur'an are not exceeding twenty one. He is still unsure about one of them. Ayatollah Ma'rafat considers the Ayaat to be only eight, the late Allamah Tabatabai counts them to be only six and finally the late Ayatollah Khoei asserted that there is only one abrogated Ayah in the Qur'an i.e.

Ayah 12 Surah 58. The author of this text can only agree with the opinion of Ayatollah Khoei.

Why Abrogated Ayaat are still in the Qur'an

As mentioned earlier, the wisdom of abrogation is legislation in accordance to different requirements. Thus, although a rule is abrogated for its circumstances have changed it shall still be kept in the scripture should its circumstances be repeated. In such a situation it is the duty of a qualified jurist to understand the circumstances and issue his verdicts in accordance to required Ayaat whether abrogated or abrogating. For instance, it is claimed that the Ayaat of forgiving the infidels (Ayah 14 of Surah 45 and 109 of Surah 2) are abrogated by the Ayaat that are commanding to fight the infidels such as Ayah 29 of Surah 9.

Nonetheless should Muslims of any age be in a similar socio-political situation of the early Muslims in Mecca and they live in a non-Islamic country as a minority their duty is to follow the rules of forgiving the infidels. This interpretation applies if we agree that the Ayaat of forgiving the infidels are abrogated. We however, suggest that the Ayaat are not abrogated for it is not permissible to fight all infidels.

The Only Abrogated Ayah in the Qur'an

As mentioned earlier it seems –as stated by the late Ayatollah Khomeini– the only Ayah that is really abrogated is Ayah 12 of Surah 58 which is abrogated by its following Ayah. Ayah 12 of Surah 58 states:

"O you who believe! When you consult the Messenger in private, spend something in charity before your private consultation. That will be better and purer for you. But if you find not (the means of it), then verily, Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful."(58: 12)

Numerous Sunni and Shi'a narrators narrated the context of the revelation of the Ayah as following:

Some of the rich Muslims– seemingly for the purpose of boasting to others– used to sit with the Prophet (S) for private consultation. As they did not have a serious matter to discuss, it was nothing more than a waste of time for the Messenger of Allah.

"Are you afraid of spending in charity before your private consultation (with him)? If then you do it not, and Allah has forgiven you, then (at least) perform Salat and give Zakat and obey Allah. And Allah is All-Aware of what you do."

Source URL:

<https://www.al-islam.org/sciences-quran-uloom-al-quran-mansour-leghaei/lesson-8-science-abrogation>