

# Arguments for Abrogation in the Qur'an: A Critique

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## Introduction

The Qur'an is perhaps the most widely consulted Scripture, and also the most manipulated source of law. *Fuqahā'* and *Mufasssirūn* have provocatively subjected the Qur'an to progressively more complex interpretative and legislative contemplation. One group of scholars uses the Qur'an to substantiate their views and rebut others; another camp of clerics uses the Qur'an to authenticate their thoughts and to condemn the rival approach. The theological and legislative debates revolving around the Qur'an have caused the one united Muslim *Ummah* to divide into various camps that have most of the time been at odds with each other over most issues.

One such issue related to the Qur'an is abrogation. Muslim scholars in general and *Fuqahā'* and *Mufasssirūn* in particular have been aggressively hostile to one another over abrogation in the Qur'an. Predominantly, there are two circles of '*ulamā'*', one favoring the abrogation and the other negating it. Both of them insist on their respective opinion on the abrogation. Neither of the two groups of scholars is prepared to give up its stand, each stating it represents the truth while the other is totally on the wrong side. Despite the lapse of fifteen hundred years since the revelation of the Qur'an, the dispute over abrogation in the Qur'an is as fresh today as it might have been at its early stage.

Logically, there are two probabilities concerning the claim over abrogation by the two groups: either both the groups of scholars have mistaken the issue of abrogation or only one of them stands for the truth. Both can in no way be on the right side. Innumerable books have been written on this subject. Yet, the matter remains unsettled. The basic factor for this situation is the traditional approach of scholars. They almost despise the rational and critical approach on anything pertaining to the Qur'an. This study takes a rational and critical look at the arguments for or against the doctrine of abrogation in the Qur'an.

## Abrogation in the Qur'an: Definition

The original Arabic term for abrogation is *al-Naskh*. In defining this term, Muslim scholars have said so many things, leaving the term undefined in a categorical manner. Anyone who reads the works of Abū 'Ubayd (d. 224 AH), al-Naḥḥās (d. 377 AH), Makkī (d. 437 AH), Ibn al-'Arabī (d. 543 AH), Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597 AH), al-Zarkashī (d. 794 AH), al-Suyūṭī (d. 911 AH), and al-Dehlawī (d. 1176 AH) on the abrogation issue will feel confused regarding its definition.

Ibn al-Jawzī's may be considered the first, to some extent, to offer a clear definition of abrogation in the Qur'an:

*Al-Naskh* literally signifies two things: (1) removal and lifting up; for example, the sun removes (carries *naskh*) the shadow because with the light of the sunrise the shadow recedes; one such example is also in the Qur'an – Allāh removes (applies *naskh*) what Satan casts in' and (2) copying a document in another place, for example, they say that the book was copied; a Qur'anic

example of this import is ‘We had been documenting what you had been doing’ As for the application of *al-naskh* in Sharī‘ah (Islamic law), it signifies in the first sense because the lifting up of a command which was initially obligatory for the people denotes its removal with or without its replacement.[1]

Al-Zurqānī was uncomfortable with the complicated approach of scholars to define *al-Naskh*. He found the discussions on its meaning in the sources of different nature, and hence saw no wisdom in referring to them. He coined a definition of abrogation that he claimed more reasonable and closer to reality: “Removal of an Islamic command by a legally valid argument (*raf‘ al-ḥukm al-shar‘ī bi dalīl shar‘ī*).[2] Ṣubḥī Ṣāliḥ deemed this definition the most precise, and was not content with the controversies of Muslim scholars over the definition of abrogation.[3]

Ibn al-Jawzī has suggested five conditions for the occurrence of abrogation. First, the ruling in the abrogating verse and the abrogated verse should contradict each other. Second, the abrogated ruling should chronologically precede its abrogating ruling. It could be known either through divine statement or through historical information. Third, the abrogated ruling should have been initially part of Islamic law. Fourth, the abrogating ruling should also be a confirmed part of Islamic law. Fifth, the justification for an abrogating ruling should be either as strong as that of its abrogated ruling or stronger than that of the abrogated one. In case of the tenuous strength of the abrogating in comparison to the abrogated one the abrogation will not occur.[4]

### **Arguments for Abrogation in the Qur’an**

The proponents of abrogation do not seem to be very clear as to the arguments confirming the theory of abrogation in the Qur’an. The reason is very simple. A controversial approach to abrogation makes the proposed arguments controversial hence not altogether valid. Arguments advanced for abrogation are numerous due to the classification of abrogation into various categories. All these arguments are of two kinds, those strengthening the concept of abrogation in general, and those reinforcing the occurrence of abrogation in the Qur’an itself.

Regarding the validity of abrogation in normal life and in Islamic law, there is actually no controversy among Muslim scholars. Ironically, the advocates of abrogation focus more and more on this dimension of the issue, stressing the message that the Qur’an is not excepted from this general rule. This category of arguments is not within the purview of this study. The scope of this study is confined to the arguments for abrogation in the Qur’an. Ibn al-Jawzī and al-Zurqānī have both categorically mentioned all the probable arguments for the abrogation in the Qur’an based on the Qur’anic verses, opinions of *Ṣaḥābah*, views of *Tābi‘ūn*, and claim of consensus.[5]

### **Arguments Based on Qur’anic Verses**

The verses quoted to corroborate the occurrence of abrogation in the Qur’an are (2:106), (2:269), (3:7), (4:160), (5:48), (13:39), (16:101), (17: 86), and (22:53). (2:106) reads: “We do not abrogate any verse or cause it to be forgotten but We bring another verse either similar to it or better than that.” This verse clearly states the occurrence or possibility of abrogation effected by God Himself. Undoubtedly, this verse forms a substantial evidence for abrogation. However, the

question is if this statement talks about the abrogation within the Qur'an. The most likely reason for exultation.

Does the word "āyah" invariably connote verse of the Qur'an? To the defenders of abrogation, 'āyah' signifies verse of the Qur'an. The answer to this question is found in the Qur'an. In Qur'anic usage, the dual variant of ayah and its plural form *āyāt* have been used 86 times, only once, and 296 times respectively. These usages do not signify just verse of the Qur'an. The Qur'an uses "ayah" in these shades of meaning: message of Allāh (2:129), (2:252); mark (3:97); symptom (19:10); masterpiece (30:21), (36:33); lesson (10:92); miracle (20:22), (23:50); Qur'anic statement (3:7); revelation in the previous heavenly Scriptures (3:113); and irrefutable proof (30:22).

In (2:115), "And God's is the east and the west: and wherever you turn, there is God's Countenance," maintaining that the Prophet's facing Jerusalem in his prayers was in the light of this revelation seems a far-fetched idea. Ibn 'Abbās believed the verse came in response to the Jewish objection to the change of direction in prayer from Jerusalem to Makkah.[6] The Prophet faced Jerusalem not only for around two years in Madīnah but also in Makkah, right from the beginning of his mission, whereas (2:115) is a Madīnah revelation.

(2:265) reads, "He who was granted wisdom was granted indeed an overflowing good." This verse is used as an argument for abrogation in the Qur'an based on Ibn 'Abbas's interpretation of this verse. He said, "Wisdom (*ḥikmah*) here signifies the understanding of the Qur'an's abrogating and abrogated rulings, that of its clear (*muḥkam*) and unclear (*mutashābih*) verses, that of its beginning and its ends, that of its lawful and unlawful, and its parables." [7] The report through which this statement is attributed to Ibn 'Abbas contains a defective chain of reporters. The narrator who reports from Ibn 'Abbās is 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭalḥah who never met Ibn 'Abbās. A weak report cannot be used as an argument. It should be checked whether *ḥikmah* denotes knowledge of abrogation in the Qur'an. *Ḥikmah* literally connotes practical and methodological understanding of knowledge.

The Qur'an articulates the duties of the Last Prophet. One of his various tasks was to teach the Book and wisdom. If, as Ibn 'Abbās interprets, *ḥikmah* refers to, among other things, knowledge of abrogation in the Qur'an, the Prophet must have taught his followers which verses of the Qur'an were abrogating and which ones were abrogated. However, the sources all lack any such information about the Prophet's teaching his Companions about abrogated and abrogating verses in the Qur'an.

To get to the import of the word *ḥikmah* in the above verse (2:269), one has to read the entire context that spreads over verses (2:267-283). In these seventeen verses, one can see three main messages: charity work is of great benefit for believers; usury-based monetary transaction is baneful for man; and monetary loans are to be properly documented and reliably testified. All these matters are financial. (2:269) is a part of that context. This particular verse communicates that understanding the objectives and advantages of these wealth-related acts is wisdom; one who understands it is ever prepared to be generous for the sake of Allāh.

If the scholars who claim to have knowledge of abrogated verses in the Qur'an are indeed blessed with wisdom, they should have irrefutable arguments at their disposal. Conversely, the proponents of abrogation in the Qur'an stand confused over how to surely identify and then justify the abrogation in the Qur'an.

(3:7) reads, "He it is who bestowed upon you from on high this divine writ, containing *āyāt muḥkamāt* that are the essence of the divine writ, and others that are *mutashābihāt*." This verse refers to the two categories of the Qur'anic verses, *muḥkamāt* and *mutashābihāt*. Aside

from the original and allegorical imports of these two terms, Ibn ‘Abbās, al-Daḥḥāk ibn Muzāḥim, and others insist that the word *mutashābihāt* signifies abrogated *āyāt* in the Qur’an.[8]

This suggestion of scholars is difficult to digest and produces several problems. Allāh makes clear that these two categories of *āyāt* are of permanent nature; the *muḥkamāt* will forever remain *muḥkamāt* and the *mutashābihāt* will not change at any stage of the time into non-*mutashābihāt*. Yet here in the abrogation system, the scholars keep changing their stand on the abrogated verses of the Qur’an. Does it, then, mean that *mutashābihāt* will keep changing its position to *muḥkamāt*? Is it fair to supersede the statement of Allāh? An example may suffice to bring the point home.

According to Ibn ‘Abbās, the command following command in (2:180) is abrogated: “It is ordained for you, when death approaches any of you and he is leaving behind much wealth, to make bequests in favor of his parents and near of kin in accordance with what is fair: this is binding on all who are conscious of God.” Hence, this statement of the Qur’an must be considered as *mutashābih*. Yet to ‘Alī, ‘Āishah, Al-Sha‘bī, and al-Nakha‘ī, the same command (2:180) is not abrogated and hence is *muḥkam*.<sup>[9]</sup> One should not refer to the same verse as *muḥkam* as well as *mutashābih*.

What is attributed to Ibn ‘Abbās concerning the meaning of *mutashābihāt* as abrogated verses of the Qur’an is doubtful. Al-Tabari has recorded Ibn ‘Abbās’s view through four chains of narrators (*sanad*). Two of these chains contain anonymous reporters and hence, these reports are weak. The two other chains are also defective due to the availability of weak reporters therein. In one chain the reporter reporting the view of Ibn ‘Abbās is ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭalḥah, who did not learn anything from Ibn ‘Abbās. Therefore, his report from Ibn ‘Abbās may not be considered reliable. The other chain has two unreliable reporters, Asbāt ibn Naṣr and Ismā‘īl al-Suddī. The view ascribed to al-Daḥḥāk ibn Muzāḥim is also not based on reliable chains. Al-Ṭabarī has used five chains. All of them are weak due to the names of Juwaybir, Salmah ibn Nubayt, Juwaybir, al-Ḥuṣayn ibn al-Farj, and Salmah ibn Nubayt respectively.

The word *mutashābihāt* means illustrative. In the Qur’an one finds the mention of the life hereafter and many other things unseen to man. To describe the unseen facts God has used metaphoric language to bring the picture of the unseen close to human perception. All places in the Qur’an where unseen items, creations, and phenomena have been mentioned constitute *mutashābihāt*.<sup>[10]</sup>

(4:160) reads: “For the iniquity of the Jews We made unlawful for them certain good things which had been lawful for them.” None but al-Zurqānī claim this verse speaks about the existence of abrogation in the Qur’an. He takes this position based on the phrase “which had been made lawful for them.” For al-Zurqānī, the making of lawful into unlawful signifies abrogation.<sup>[11]</sup> It is certainly an occurrence of abrogation. But where did it occur, in the Qur’an or Torah? There should not be any confusion over the meaning of the verse 4:160. It indicates how the Jews were punished due to their belligerent approach to their religion. In one such punishment, Jews were barred from utilizing certain things already lawful. Ibn ‘Abbās says that this verse (4:160) reminds us of the fact that the Jews carried out some changes in Torah, making certain things unlawful on their own.

The concerned part of the verse 5:48 reads: “For every one of you We made a law and a way.” Does this verse in any way indicate the occurrence of abrogation in the Qur’an? For a vivid picture of this divine statement it is desirable to read not only the whole verse but also its preceding and succeeding verses. The translation of the whole verse follows: “And We revealed to you the Book with truth which confirms the Book before it and serves as its guardian: so judge

between them by what Allāh has revealed, and follow not their vain desires diverging from the truth that has come to you. For every one of you We made a law and a way. If Allāh had so willed, He would have made you a single people but (His plan is) to test you in what He has given you: so strive as in a race in all virtues. The goal of you all is to Allāh; it is He who will show you the truth of the matters in which you dispute.”

This verse sends three main messages: the Qur’an represents the truth; the Qur’an is the only source of law for the people; and decision of any dispute is to be made in the light of the Qur’an, and not based on what is there in the previous Scriptures. The occurrence of the word “truth” as the attribute of the Qur’an in the verse sends a message beyond any doubt that the Qur’an contains truth from every angle and in every single verse. To say that certain verses of the Qur’an are abrogated as to their practicability is tantamount to not accepting the Qur’an as the truth. This verse (5:48) and its preceding and succeeding verses give a repeated call to reject the stand of the Jews on the Scriptures of God and to follow the Last revealed Scripture of Allāh. The above clause of the verse “For every one We made a law and a way” rather confirms that the previous laws revealed in the previous Scriptures are no longer valid; and that the laws revealed in the Qur’an are the only valid provisions of law. Makkī ibn Abī Ṭālib stressed that this verse refers to the abrogation of the previous prophets’ laws and not to the laws in the Qur’an.[12]

(13:39) reads, “Allāh annuls and confirms whatever He will, for with Him is the source of all revelation,” and is used as an argument for abrogation on the basis of a statement attributed to Ibn ‘Abbās: “Allah replaces in the Qur’an whatever He wills to abrogate and retains whatever He wills not to abrogate. Both the abrogated and the abrogating are in the mother of the Book. All that are replaced as well as retained are in the Book.”[13] Qatādah ibn Di‘āmah claims this verse conveys the same idea as (2:106): as (2:106) talks about abrogation in the Qur’an, (13:39) also substantiates the theory of abrogation in the Qur’an.[14] The chain through which Ibn ‘Abbās’s view has been reported seems to be defective due to the inclusion of ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭalḥah, who never benefited from Ibn ‘Abbās. Probably, Qatādah based his opinion on Ibn ‘Abbās’s statement. This verse uses the word *maḥu*, which means effacement and total removal; wherever the *maḥu* takes place, nothing remains in place. Abrogation theory emphasizes that both the abrogating and the abrogated verse remain in the Qur’an. In that case, (13:39) should not speak about the abrogation in the Qur’an.

If we read the whole *Sūrah al-Ra’d* (13), we can see the surah consoles the Prophet and his followers, and also rebuts various suppositions developed by the opponents; i.e., Quraysh. The above verse (13:39) forms an answer to the objection raised by the men of Quraysh that with the presence of the previous heavenly Scriptures revealed to previous prophets, there did not arise any need for the new Scripture. In the answer it was stressed that God willed to efface the previous Scriptures as the sources of law and send new Scripture; i.e., the Qur’an.[15]

“Every fixed term (*ajal*) has had its *Kitāb*,” goes the last statement of the preceding verse (13:38). The statement in (13:39) connects to the previous one. In this way, (13:39) is not advocating the theory of abrogation but rather the prerogative of God to annul the previous Scripture and replace it with the Qur’an. Apart from that, the verse is a Makkī revelation; it is, then, wonderfully strange to suggest this verse alludes to abrogation theory. The concept of abrogation surfaced only in Madīnah where a new society based on Islamic laws was being developed.

(16:101) reads: “And when We substitute one revelation for another -- and Allāh knows best what He reveals in stages -- they say: You are but a forger! Nay, but most of them do not understand it.” This verse is taken as an argument for the progression in the commands of Allāh

through revelation in the Qur'an. This stand is untenable. This verse is a Makkan revelation. In Makkan revelations one may not find such progression in the laws. (16:101) itself refers to the observation of the Quraysh that Muḥammad himself fabricated the messages in different ways and presented them in stages in the name of God. The men of Quraysh could not have raised the question of abrogation of laws in Makkah. This verse reminded Quraysh that it was not Muḥammad who made the Qur'an in stages but God who knew very well about what to reveal where and when in the Qur'an. Seyyed Mawdūdī, while interpreting (16:101), observed that in Makkan revelations one could see the same message in different styles and arguments that are scattered at various places in the Qur'an. These revelations in stages made Quraysh believe the Qur'an was Muḥammad's own work; had it been from God, it would have been revealed all at once. He maintained that the Makkan revelations do not have the progression in Islamic laws.[16]

(17:86) reads: "If it were Our will, We could take away that which We have revealed to you: then would you find none to plead your case against Us." Undoubtedly, this verse refers to the power of God to lift up His own command, but it does not prove that God sent a revelation in the Qur'an and lifted it up. The verse after it -- "Except for Mercy from your Lord; for His bounty on you is great" (17:87) -- reasserts that Allāh out of His bounty on the Last Prophet would never take away what He revealed to him. This verse speaks only about the possibility of abrogation and the occurrence of abrogation in the Qur'an. This verse (17:86) is part of the answer to a question raised by the Quraysh on behalf of Jews in Madīnah concerning the meaning of "spirit." The answer begins from (17:85): "They ask you concerning the Spirit. Say: The Spirit is of the command of my Lord. And you were not granted of this knowledge but very little," and ends with (17:87). The Spirit is actually revelation entirely at the discretion of Allāh as to where, when, what, and to whom to send down. Makki made (17:86) as the basis to claim that God erased certain revelation of the Qur'an from the hearts and documents,[17] which is gross speculation, and speculation does not substitute for the truth (10:36).

(22:52) reads: "Never did We send a messenger or a prophet before you, but, when he framed a desire, Satan cast something into his desire: but Allāh cancels what Satan casts in, and He confirms His messages. Allāh is full of knowledge and wisdom." Even a layman can see this verse is talking about the abrogation of something cast in the hearts of the prophets by Satan, and not about the abrogation of the Qur'anic verses. *Mufasssirūn*, while interpreting this verse, brought in a story about Satan putting into the mouth of the Prophet some of his own verses that admired the goddesses of Quraysh, and proved how God deleted those Satanic insertions into revelation. *Mufasssirūn* forgot the assurance of God in the verse 15:9: "We without doubt sent the Message to you step by step and We are responsible to safeguard it." God's promise to protect the revelation does not merely signify that after the revelation but also before and during its revelation. To claim that Satan managed to interfere into the process of revelation of *Sūrah al-Najm* (53) is to falsify the divine guarantee for the safety of revelation from any corruption whatsoever made in (15:9).

### **Arguments Based on the Views of Ṣahābah and Ṭābi'ūn Scholars**

While showing the significance of abrogation in the Qur'an, the advocates of abrogation quote three statements attributed to three Sahabah: 'Umar ibn al-Khattab, 'Ali ibn Abi Talib, and 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Abbās. 'Umar said, "Ubay ibn Ka'b is the most knowledgeable among us on abrogation." [18] Ibn al-Jawzī did not give the chain of narrators of this report, so its reliability

cannot be ascertained. Apart from its authenticity, one need not construe ‘Umar’s statement as a reference to the abrogation in the Qur’an. He simply praised the knowledge of Ubay on the issue of abrogation. He did not say that Ubayy was the most knowledgeable of the abrogation in the Qur’an. Ubay ibn Ka‘b knew of previous Scriptures, and hence knew very well which commands of Torah were annulled by the Qur’an.

‘Alī’s view is advanced in the form of a dialogue between him and a storyteller. ‘Alī asked him whether he was aware of the abrogating (*al-nāsikh*) and the abrogated (*al-mansūkh*). When he answered in the negative, ‘Alī warned him: You destroyed yourself as well as others.[19] In what way does this report constitute an argument for abrogation in the Qur’an? Was the storyteller a teacher of the Qur’an whom ‘Alī warned of the serious consequences of his ignorance of abrogation in the Qur’an? Was there any reference in ‘Alī’s question to the abrogation in the Qur’an? The storyteller was not a teacher of the Qur’an. The title storyteller speaks very clearly about his position. Had he been a teacher of the Qur’an, he would never have been insinuated as storyteller. It seems from the report that the storyteller used to narrate stories of all sorts, including the stories of the previous people and the prophets based on his understanding of the previous Scriptures. When ‘Alī asked him about his knowledge of the abrogating and the abrogated, he might have asked him about the abrogating revelations in the Qur’an and the abrogated verses in the previous Scriptures.

Ibn ‘Abbās’s view has been discussed above. His interpretation of verses such as (2:106), (3:7, et cetera confirms his view on abrogation in the Qur’an. These verses have been discussed thoroughly as to their import. They do not speak about abrogation in the Qur’an but about abrogation by the Qur’an of the previous Scriptures. The name of Ibn ‘Abbās has been misused and abused by people with vested interests. If all reports attributed to Ibn ‘Abbās were critically checked, they might prove either weak or unreliable. The *tafsīr* work “*Tanwīr al-Miqbās*” is attributed to Ibn ‘Abbās. Scholars have proven beyond any doubt that the two reporters who report the *tafsīrī* views of Ibn ‘Abbās are liars and hence unreliable. Ibn ‘Abbās should not be blamed, but the reporters who attribute the statements to him are to be condemned as unreliable.

Among *tabi‘ūn* scholars, the most prominent supporters of abrogation are Sa‘īd ibn al-Musayyab, Mujāhid ibn Jabr, Qatādah ibn Di‘āmah, and al-Daḥḥāk ibn Muzāḥim. One can find their declaration of this or that verse as abrogated in the sources. Since they consider certain verses of the Qur’an abrogated, the theory of abrogation in the Qur’an is taken as justified. There is no doubt that they declared certain verses as abrogated, but we have to investigate what they meant by declaring a verse abrogated. Some examples may suffice to crystallize the matter.

First, when Anas ibn Mālīk grew old and turned unable to fast in the month of Ramadān, he would feed the poor instead every day as compensation for his fasting. This he used to do in the light of the concession granted in the Qur’an: “For those who can do it is the ransom, the feeding of an indigent.” (2:184).[20] Anas ibn Mālīk, like others, also considered that facility as abrogated. Why then did he practice it? To him, abrogation of a ruling in the Qur’an never signified permanent invalidity of the Qur’anic command. Second, Ibn ‘Abbās decreed that after a woman gave birth she was allowed to pay ransom in place of fasting.[21] Ibn ‘Abbās said time and again that the permission to pay ransom for fasting (2:184) was abrogated. If he meant permanent abrogation of the verse, why did he, then, allow women to do that? Certainly, to him, abrogation in the Qur’an meant impracticability of certain rulings of the Qur’an in certain given situations. Third, ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Umar was once asked about the position of a pregnant woman who fasted in Ramadān but suffered from dehydration. He advised the woman to break the fasting and pay the ransom every day.[22] He did consider that concession abrogated for healthy,

normal women and men, but for the pregnant and the sick, he did not find the ruling abrogated. Fourth, Abū al-‘Āliyah did not fast in the month of Ramadān in his old age, and paid the ransom instead.[23]

### **Argument Based on the Existence of Abrogated Rulings in the Qur’an**

Al-Zurqānī advanced an argument in favor of abrogation in the Qur’an, saying there certain verses in the Qur’an that can never be practiced.[24] Is this an argument? Who said this verse or that verse was abrogated? Did God clearly indicate to the abrogated revelation in the Qur’an? Certainly, there is no statement in the Qur’an referring to the abrogated rulings. Did, then, the Prophet identify the practically invalid commands in the Qur’an? There is no such tradition in the ḥadīth literature. It simply means that al-Zurqānī and others from the community of Muslim scholars made suppositions on their own that some verses of the Qur’an were practically invalid forever. Ironically, the identification of abrogated rulings in the Qur’an was in the past and still is an act of personally motivated manipulation of the Qur’an.

Scholars of abrogation, Fuqahā’ and *Mufasssirūn* miserably failed to refine the principles of abrogation so as to give them universal shape. Different scholars developed their own standards of abrogation in the Qur’an, which is why they could not agree unanimously as to which verses are abrogated.

Behind this declaration there is a hypothesis that the number of abrogated verses might be reduced further. Probably, Shāh Walī Allāh al-Dehlawī took up this challenge and decreased the number of abrogated verses from twenty-one to only five. This narrowing down of the abrogated verses took place based on interpretation of the verses concerned. According to al-Dehlawī, the only abrogated verses in the Qur’an are (2:180), (2:240), (8:65), (33:52), and (58:12).[25] Interestingly, these five verses have been declared by others from the proponents of abrogation as non-abrogated.[26] Therefore, no verse of the Qur’an stands abrogated. In this case, the stance of al-Zurqānī regarding the existence of abrogated verses in the Qur’an turns out to be untenable.

### **Argument Based on the Claim of Consensus**

Commentators of the Qur’an and scholars of Qur’anic studies claim there is a consensus of Muslim *Ummah* over abrogation in the Qur’an. Ibn al-Jawzī says that *ulamā’* have the consensus over the occurrence of abrogation in the Qur’an but some did not agree to it.[27] Al-Naḥḥās says that some people rejected the existence of abrogating and abrogated verses in the Qur’an; their approach is not reasonable because they oppose the consensus of Muslim *Ummah* and also the Qur’anic stipulation on the matter.[28] Al-Suyūṭī claims that Muslims have consensus on the abrogation in the Qur’an.[29] Al-Zurqānī slightly changes his statement: “Early generations of Muslim scholars (*salaf al-ummah*) had consensus of opinion over the fact that there occurred abrogation in the Islamic law.”

In the statement of al-Naḥḥās and Ibn al-Jawzī there is a very clear recognition of controversy among scholars over abrogation in the Qur’an. Both accept the existence of some who rejected the abrogation theory. Does this situation refer to consensus? They have themselves disputed their own stance. Consensus occurs only when all the scholars, without any exception, agree to the issue concerned; even the dissent of one single scholar makes the matter controversial. Al-Suyūṭī avoided the mention of difference of opinion on abrogation, although he knew very well the nature of the situation. He frequently borrowed ideas and information from



al-Zarkashī's work, "*Ulūm al-Qur'ān*." Why did he not, then, take from al-Zarkashī the statement concerning Muslim scholars' controversy over the issue of abrogation?

Al-Zarkashī referred to the views of some other scholars who considered the Qur'an abrogator of the previous Scriptures, and not of its own revelations. Al-Zarkashī seems to have supported the idea of the Qur'an being protected from all kinds of contradictions. To substantiate his understanding, he quoted (15:9): "Verily, We sent the Message (Qur'an) down step by step and We shall safeguard it."<sup>[30]</sup> Al-Zurqānī suggests Muslim scholars' consensus over abrogation in Islamic law and describes disagreement of other scholars from early to modern times.<sup>[31]</sup>

There is actually no consensus on abrogation in the Qur'an among Muslim scholars; scholars are divided into groups, one supporting it and the other negating it. In addition, the claim of consensus controverts the reality in history today. Al-Rāzī stated that a consensus of Muslim scholars is not a sufficient basis to cancel the practical validity of Qur'anic rulings.<sup>[32]</sup>

### **Āyat al-Sayf and Āyat al-Qitāl Versus Generosity and Justice towards Non-Muslims**

A number of verses in the Qur'an exhort believers to uphold justice and treat non-believers generously. For example, (4:90): "So if they (non-Muslim fighters) withdraw from you, and fight not against you, and offer peace to you, then Allah opened no way for you against them." Part of (5:2) reads: "And let not the hatred of some people in shutting you out of the Sacred Mosque lead you to transgression. Help you one another in righteousness and piety, but help you not one another in sin and rancor." The starting phrase of (20:130) reads: "So be patient with what they (non-believers) say," while (33:48) reads: "And obey not the unbelievers and hypocrites, and disregard their insolence; but put your trust in Allāh, for enough is Allāh as a Disposer of affairs."

These verses and many others advise the Prophet and his followers to be patient with the insolent approach of the enemies, to be generous towards non-believers, and to be just towards non-Muslims. Yet the stalwarts of abrogation dared declare all such commands of the Most Merciful null and void, based on two statements: (9:5) "Kill the polytheists wherever you find them, capture them and besiege them, and lie in wait for them in each and every ambush"; and (9:29) "Fight against those who believe not in Allāh, nor in the Last Day, not forbid that which has been forbidden by Allāh and His Messenger, and those who acknowledge not the religion of truth among the people of Scripture until they pay the *jizyah* with willing submission and feel themselves subdued." These two verses are known in legal terminology as *āyat al-sayf* and *āyat al-qitāl*.

Qatādah ibn Di'āmah observed: "Everything in the Qur'an advising avoidance of conflict with the disbelievers stands abrogated by the *āyat al-sayf* and *āyat al-qitāl*."<sup>[33]</sup> As per the calculation of Ibn al-Jawzī, around one hundred-ten verses that promote leniency, kindness, patience, and generosity towards non-believers are considered abrogated by *āyat al-sayf* and *āyat al-qitāl*. He did not agree to this number but supported the abrogation of only twelve of them. *Āyat al-sayf* and *āyat al-qitāl* came down in connection with the situation of war. As for the normal situation, these two verses remain unexecuted. The Prophet's agreements with the Jews and Arabs, particularly Quraysh, and other warring parties for peace serve as enough evidence for the peaceful coexistence policy of Islam. It seems that the image of Muslims in the west as terrorists is consequent upon the abrogation of generosity towards non-Muslims.

### **Arguments against Abrogation in the Qur'an**

On the forefront of the movement against the abrogation theory was Abū Muslim al-Aṣfahānī.

His arguments to rebut the claim about abrogation in the Qur'an are of two kinds: statement of the Qur'an; and interpretation of the Qur'an.

According to al-Aṣfahānī, the statement of the Qur'an that negates the existence of abrogation in the Qur'an is, "No falsehood can approach it from before or behind it: it is sent down by One Full of Wisdom, Worthy of all Praise" (41:42). He declared the abrogation theory a falsehood (*bāṭil*).<sup>[34]</sup> Is his stance correct? Al-Zurqānī rebutted the observation of Abu Muslim with his conviction that abrogation in the Qur'an is the truth (*al-ḥaqq*), and not falsehood (*bāṭil*). Al-Zurqānī does not give any evidence to prove the authenticity of his belief except (2:106), which states that God carries out abrogation (we have already discussed the message of this verse above). (2:106) does refer to abrogation but not in the Qur'an -- in the previous scriptures by the Qur'an. It is difficult to accept the theory of abrogation in the Qur'an as the truth (*al-ḥaqq*) because the theory of abrogation insists on the existence of conflict (*ta'ārud* and *tanāqud*). The notion of conflict between one revelation of the Qur'an and another is false. Al-Zurqānī maintained that abrogation denotes permanent suspension of practical validity of a verse but retains the position of the verse concerned as a Qur'anic revelation.<sup>[35]</sup>

Al-Zurqānī forgot that reciting a verse and believing its authenticity as the part of the Qur'an necessitates its imperativeness. Every command of the Qur'an represents the truth from every possible angle: it is a revelation from on high; it is a part of the Qur'an; it is to be believed as the most sacred; it is to be recited as a command of God; and it is to be acted upon wherever it is relevant. Yet abrogation theory throws its validity for practical purpose. It is certainly tantamount to consider it invalid. Invalidity of a Qur'anic command renders it false. The argument of Abū Muslim seems to be logical.

Al-Aṣfahānī proposed that the Qur'anic verses should be interpreted rather than abrogated. Supporters of abrogation, for instance, declare (2:180) "It is prescribed for you, when death approached any of you, if he leaves wealth, that he makes bequest to parents and next of kin according to reasonable usage. This is a duty upon the pious" abrogated. Abū Muslim interpreted it to remain practically valid, saying that the bequest, as the verse suggests, should be as per reasonable manner (*bi al-ma'rūf*). He explained that *al-ma'rūf* meant here in accordance with the command of God as stated in the inheritance verses (*ayat al-mirāth*) (4:7-14). *Al-ma'rūf* does not certainly mean according to the prevalent custom in the society, but means "what is good." Furthermore, the good is only what God declares as good. There is nothing wrong in this interpretative approach of Abū Muslim – his suggestion seems quite rational. With this method to interpret the Qur'an, the practical validity of the so called abrogated verses can be traced. The stance of Abū Muslim is sufficiently substantiated by the Qur'an. Verses such as (2:185), (4:82), (5:3), (11:1), (17:82), (36:2), and (39:28) unequivocally spell out that the Qur'an in its entirety is ever relevant in human life.

(2:185) reads: "Ramadān is the month in which was sent down the Qur'an as a guide to mankind, and as clear proofs for guidance, and as the criterion (for right and wrong)." This verse speaks about three attributes of the Qur'an: source of guidance, proofs of guidance, and standard for right and wrong. These three qualities apply to the entire Qur'an. In case the abrogation in the Qur'an is taken for granted, certain part thereof will get deprived of these attributes. Abrogation has created confusion and irreconcilable controversy among 'ulamā' and the Muslim masses.

This is not a situation of guidance. Thus, anything curtailing the position of the Qur'an as guidance is not sustainable.

(4:82) reads: "Do they not ponder on the Qur'an? Had it been from any other than Allāh, they would surely have found therein many discrepancies." According to this statement, the Qur'an is free from any kind of discrepancy, and the supporters of abrogation theory insist that there are legal rulings that are contradictory to each other. Now, it is a matter of choice between the two statements, one from Allāh and the other from man. Certainly, the choice will be of Allāh's declaration because the belief in the abrogation theory amounts to the existence of contradiction among verses of the Qur'an. If there are no conflict between commands of Allāh, as (4:82) communicates, there is no abrogation in the Qur'an at all.

(5:3) highlights the lawful and unlawful for the believers: "This day have I perfected your religion, completed My favor upon you, and have chosen for you Islam as your way of life." With the revelation of this message, the Prophet and his followers were assured of the perfection of the Qur'an. Abrogation theory negates it and thrusts by force an idea that the Qur'an is still imperfect.

(11:1) reads: "Alif Lam Ra; this is a Book the verses whereof were perfected (*uḥkimat*) and then explained in detail from One who is All-Wise, Well-Aware." The message of this verse is very clear. Both the categories of verses in the Qur'an -- *muḥkamāt* and *mutashābihāt* -- are full of wisdom. No lacuna remains in either of the two kinds of verses whereby imperfection of any nature can penetrate into the Qur'an. This verse refers to two qualities of the Qur'anic verses, perfected and explained in detail. Do these two attributes of the Qur'anic revelations give way to abrogation? Abrogation is in stark contrast with the two features of the Qur'an.

(17:82) reads: "We send down of the Qur'an that which is cure and mercy for the believers."

Whatever came down in the Qur'an serves as cure for the suffering of man in this life. Abrogation keeps the believers away from some of the Qur'anic panacea, because the defenders of abrogation in the Qur'an see some of the Qur'anic revelations as poison for practical life. The Qur'an is all remedy but the abrogation theory renders some part thereof to be malady. Undoubtedly, every piece of the Qur'an is remedy, and not what the champions of abrogation proclaim.

(36:2) reads: "By the Qur'an, full of wisdom." This verse refers to the Qur'an as *ḥakīm* (wise). This is also one of the attributes of Allāh. The Qur'an is wise because it originates from the Wise. This attribute of the Qur'an speaks volumes of the position of the Qur'an: each and every single command of Allāh is relevant. If any verse of the Qur'an is relegated as irrelevant for man, the Qur'an, then, cannot remain as wise. Abrogation theory serves as antithesis to this position of the Qur'an.

(39:28) reads: "This is a Qur'an in Arabic without any crookedness therein." But the abrogation theorists indirectly utter: "Beware, there is crookedness at some places in the Qur'an." Is the abrogation theory anything other than crookedness? Abrogation theory and the declaration in (39:28) are two contradictory dimensions. Which one is, then, acceptable and which one is to be rejected? Naturally, the information conveyed in (39:28) represents the truth.

### **Abrogation in the Qur'an and the Prophet**

The Qur'an was revealed to the Prophet. He was also granted by Allāh the *bayān* (explanation) of the Qur'an. Since he taught the Qur'an to his followers, he must have given

them all that was necessary for them. One does not find any direct statement of the Prophet indicating that any verse of the Qur'an as practically invalid. If he remained silent over this matter, it means there is no verse abrogated. Abrogation theory adversely affects the integrity of the Qur'an. Anything causing the Qur'an to lose its original position stands logically rejected.

## Conclusion

The arguments for the abrogation in the Qur'an are based on some Qur'anic verses, views of early generations of scholars, claims about the existence of abrogated verses in the Qur'an, and claims of consensus. In most cases, the Qur'anic verses used as arguments in favor of abrogation theory are misquoted. They are read either outside the context or are advanced only in part. When reading those verses in full and also in context, a totally different message emerges. Reading the Qur'an halfheartedly is manipulation and not interpretation. The concept of abrogation in the eyes of early generations of scholars was not what was construed later. To them, abrogation never denoted permanent suspension of the Qur'anic commands. Claim of consensus is misrepresentation of the situation. There has always been controversy over this matter. To claim that some verses of the Qur'an are abrogated is to cast doubt about the authenticity of the Qur'an.

Neither God nor His Prophet ever guided man in a categorical manner that this verse or that verse is practically invalid. There are many verses in the Qur'an that spell out various attributes of the Qur'an (e.g., guide, wise, cure, et cetera.), which necessitate the practical relevance of the Qur'an in its entirety. There is no authentic statement of the Prophet referring to the abrogated verses of the Qur'an. The only viable way to resolve the abrogation-related controversy is to endeavor to interpret the verses concerned. Sincere effort to understand the practical relevance of the verses in dispute will certainly bring results.

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[4] Ibn al-Jawzī, *Nawāsikh*, pp.23-24.

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[6] Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān fī Ta'wīl al-Qur'ān* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1997), vol.1, p.549, report no.1835.

[7] Ibn al-Jawzī, *Nawāsikh*, p. 32.

[8] Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi'*, vol.3, pp.172-173.

[9] Ibn al-Jawzī, *Nawāsikh*, p. 58; Al-Zarkashī, *Al-Burhān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'an* (Beirut: Dār-al-Ma'rifah, 1994), vol.2, pp.221-222.

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[21] Ibid., p.65.

[22] Ibid., p.63.

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