

# How many Ayah of Quran are abrogated?

*Khurshid Imam*

## A. Introduction

Muslim: “You know Quran is word by word God’s word. Quran provides way of life. Its language is so eloquent, its word so perfect that it does not resemble human work. Each word, each ayah is beautiful, choice of word is so perfect that .....

Not yet Muslim: “Oh! Is it? I would love to read this book and understand it. Please give me Quran”

Muslim: “Sure brother! Take it. But... you know there are many Ayah in Quran that are not relevant now. Their orders / commandments are cancelled. You can read those ayah but can not practice it. I don’t identify those ayah. Some scholars told hundreds of such ayah exists in Quran while some have pointed out only 5. So I can’t point out who is correct.”

Not yet Muslim: “I am confused. You told Quran is God’s word, it should be free from any weakness or defect. Is not God most-wise?”

Muslim: “Also there were some ayah in Quran EARLIER but they are lost now. They are not to be found in Quran any more. But we need to practice those lost ayah. Lost ayah will be practiced even by going against some Quranic ayah”

Not yet Muslim: “I am ultra confused!!!!”

Muslim: “Wait!! I have to tell some more aspects of Quran also ....”

Not yet Muslim: “God’s word is not source of confusion and imperfection. Bye bye, I m going.”

## B. The myth of abrogation in Quran

If you ask about the concept of abrogation in Quran, then most probably you will get answer that:

1. Sometimes Allah enforces a legal edict that is relevant only to a particular situation.
2. Later, in His infinite wisdom, He cancels the order and enforces a new one in its place.
3. This action is known as “abrogation” (naskh), and the replaced order is then termed “abrogated” (mansukh) while the new replacing order is called “abrogator” (nasikh).
4. It means the abrogated ayah of the quran was meant only till the abrogator ayah was revealed. Abrogated ayah can never ever be practiced.

Abrogation concept says - "Allah gave a ruling for a particular issue. But later on Allah changed the ruling through another Ayah. Hence the previous ruling is cancelled and irrelevant now."

Abrogation is translated from the Arabic word *naskh* which literally means “to erase; to compensate.” Its technical definition is “to repeal a legal order through legal argument”.

The concept of abrogation opens door for some serious questions as it is full of flaws. It goes against Quran and common sense. All arguments given in favor of abrogation are extremely bogus-can not go down well to any honest and logical person. In order to justify abrogation

people come up with weak arguments which puts islam into dock and make us laughing stock. Anti-islamic writers exploit it to defame Quran and islam.

### Why abrogation came into existence?

1. **The root reason for the evolution of the concept of abrogation was inability to explain the “seemingly-contradiction” in the Quran.** When we felt that a particular ayah of the Quran contradicts with other ayah of Quran and both can not be practiced then we declared one of the ayah to be abrogated. It means this ayah is not relevant today; its ruling / command / order was cancelled by Allah by another ayah.

2. This concept was accepted by the general body of scholars as a fundamental aspect of Islamic legislation, and there is therefore not a single book on Usul al-Fiqh (The basic legal theories of source methodology in Islam) which does not have a section on the issue.

3. Let me give you one **horrible** example of abrogation concept:

While explaining the ayah - "*There is no compulsion in religion...*" (Quran, Surah Baqrah 2:256) - a famous salafi website says that this ayah is abrogated and hence invalid now. Please read carefully what is told on this site about ayah 2:256

*"Other scholars said that this applied in the beginning, but was subsequently abrogated by Allaah's command to fight and wage jihad. So whoever refuses to enter Islam should be fought when the Muslims are able to fight, until they either enter Islam or pay the jizyah if they are among the people who may pay jizyah. The kuffaar should be compelled to enter Islam if they are not people from whom the jizyah may be taken, because that will lead to their happiness and salvation in this world and in the Hereafter."*

Source: <http://www.islamqa.com/en/ref/34770/abrogated>

[I am very sorry to say that above quoted statements from the site is completely alien to islam; contradicting to the very basic of islam; it projects islam as a violent, illogical and inhumane religion. Tell me why non muslims

will not hate islam if one teaches such things? **No wonder the general perception created by us is that all ayah revealed in mecca which speaks about peace, love and harmony were abrogated by ayah speaking about fighting with non-muslims revealed during medina life!!!!**

Oh Allah! Have mercy on the ummah and its learned people.]

A contemporary Scholar, Muhammad Al-Ghazali's (Born 1917) says:

*"The allegation that 120 verses on the invitation to Islam were abrogated by the verse of the sword [Surah tauba 9:5], is in fact one of crassest stupidity and only serves to show that the great number of Muslims are in a stage of regression of either knowledge or intelligence in our time, and have become ignorant of the Qur'an. As a result of this ignorance therefore, they have forgotten how to call to the way of God, how to facilitate the call to Islam, and how to be proper examples, and how to present a good perspective. Perhaps this is the reason for the failure in the propagation of Islam, and the prolonged stagnation of the Islamic message being affected—for it has been assumed that the sword is that which fulfills the obligation of delivering the message. Such a concept is, by the agreement of all those who are rational and discerning, totally absurd."*

## Family members of abrogation

As if this shock is not enough we have some more from the "misunderstanding of Quran" list.

Abrogation concept has its whole family ruling over minds of muslims for centuries.

Once the concept of abrogation was given sanction from the Qur'an and hadith, the jurists started categorizing the different types of abrogation. Three types of abrogation in Quran are explained as:

(1) Abrogation of the text and its ruling: It is said that there were some Ayah in the Quran earlier; they no more exists in Quran now; so their recitation and command - both are cancelled and abrogated. For example: We are told that earlier there were some ayah in Surah ahzab (Surah number 33) that were as long as Surah Baqrah (Surah number 2). But these ayah are not part of Quran now. (Musnad Ahmad, Hadith 21245)

(2) Abrogation of the text, but not its ruling: We are told that there were some ayah in Quran that no more exists in Quran now but they should be followed today. According to this story, the 'stoning verse' was recorded in Quran during the time of Prophet Muhammad; but after his death, a goat ate the page on which that verse was inscribed. Thus, the stoning verse has been abrogated physically. Ibn Maja, Nikah, 36/1944 and Musnad Imam Ibn Hanbal, 5/131,132,183; 6/269.

(3) Abrogation of the ruling, but not the text: It means there are ayah in Quran that will be recited but will not be practiced. For example: Ayah dealing with prohibition of alcohol; Ayah quoted above from the website about 2:256; Ayah dealing with *kalala*; Ayah dealing with *fidya* in context with fasting; Ayah dealing with marriage with ahle-kitab women etc. This is the type of abrogation which we are dealing in this article.

## One important observation

Quran is a book that constantly urges its reader to ponder over it, understand its meaning and not be blind minded. The more one ponder over Quran better will be understanding. Scholars who declare abrogation in Quran have good intention. But piety does not always refer to intelligence level of a person. The passing of time has seen a tremendous fluctuation in the number of ayah alleged to have been abrogated.

Al-Zuhri (8th century AD), one of the first to write on the subject, mentioned 42 abrogated ayah in Quran,

Al-Nahhas (10th century AD), mentioned 138 abrogated ayah in Quran,

Ibn Salama (11th century AD), mentioned 238 abrogated ayah in Quran,

Ibn al-Ata'iqi (14th century AD), mentioned 231 abrogated ayah in Quran,

al-Suyutti (16th century AD), declared 20 ayah of quran to be abrogated!

Shah Wali Allah (18th century AD), mentioned only 5 instances of abrogation in Quran!!

Will not Quran become a laughing stock where; as per some scholars there are 500 ayah in Quran which will be recited but not practiced; while some scholars say that 200 such ayah exists; and on the other extreme some scholars will tell that only 5 such ayah exists in Quran. The whole Quran will loose its beauty, its divinity. Why were they given to us in our constitution and

guidance if we are not to obey them? Tell me-how come then Quran is divine? How come Quran is so wonderful book?

**Attention: All so-called-examples of abrogation in Quran can be very well explained by pondering over the Quran. I am not going into detail for those. Each so-called-examples of abrogation require separate article.**

Visit <http://khurshidimam.blogspot.in/2011/12/marriage-with-ahle-kitab-women.html> for explanation regarding so called abrogation for "*marriage with mushrik women*" ayah.

**If any human being had the right to declare some ayah of Quran to be abrogated then this right was for the one on whom Quran was revealed i.e. Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him). But he never declared any such thing.**

### **C. Concept of abrogation clearly contradicts with Quran**

An anti-islamic writer writes - "*Muslim authorities try to explain the internal apparent contradictions in the Qur'an by stating that certain passages of the Qur'an are annulled (Mansukh) by verses revealed chronologically later, known as Nasikh verses. Yet, there is by no means any certainty as to which disagreeing verses are mansukh and which are nasikh, since the order in which the Qur'an was compiled was not done chronologically*".

1. As it is crystal clear that the reason for evolution of abrogation concept is to solve the problem of seemingly-contradictory ayah in Quran. For example: Ayah dealing with prohibition of alcohol (2:219; 4:43; 5:90) perplexed scholars as they found it impossible to practice all three ayah. They misunderstood that there is contradiction in commandment of these 3 ayah; hence they declared first two ayah to be abrogated.

Actually no way there is any contradiction in these 3 ayah.

But, but, but... those people who feel that any two ayah of Quran is contradicting then they are agreeing that Quran is NOT AT ALL from GOD!!! Wait- don't get angry. Look what Allah has to say:

***"Do they not consider the Qur'an with care? Had it been from other Than Allah, they would surely have found therein many contradictions". Quran-Surah Nisa 4:82***

Quran tells that if Quran contains contradiction then Quran is not from God. So those people who believe in abrogation - which is because of assuming Quran contains contradictory ayah - are proving that Quran is not from God. The miracle of Quran is that it distinguishes right from wrong. Abrogation is clearly in contradiction to Quran.

2. How can Quran be a unique masterpiece, divine message if it cancels its own ruling?

What was the need then in the first place to reveal such ayah if Allah already knew that he is going to cancel his words? Its human words that contradict - word of Allah can never contradict, God can not go against his own words.

***"No change can there be in the Words of Allah (Quran, Surah yunus 10:64)***

***"There is none that can alter the Words of Allah (Quran, Sura Anam 6:34)***

If the Qur'an is indeed of divine authorship, and is perfect in its construction and style, no Ayah can be better than another; how then could one Ayah abrogate another? **Is God not Wise and Far-Seeing enough to give rulings that are permanent?** Abrogation of a law meant that it became illegal in the face of the one replacing it, and that this latter one was illegal while the former was in place. This would be to declare good as evil and evil as good, clearly not a divine activity

Almighty God mentions clearly that Allah can not change his words. It means if he has given a ruling for a particular issue-in a particular context and situation-then this can not change.

#### **D. Does Quran support abrogation?**

Supporter of abrogation quote one particular ayah in their support.

1. مَا نَنْسَخْ مِنْ آيَةٍ أَوْ نُنسِهَا نَأْتِ بِخَيْرٍ مِّنْهَا أَوْ مِثْلَهَا

"None of Our Ayah (sign) do We abrogate or cause to be forgotten, but We substitute something better or similar: Knowest thou not that Allah Hath power over all things?" *Quran-Surah Baqrah 2:106*

a. People think that in this ayah Allah is talking about abrogation of Quranic ayah. They fail to realize that this ayah is also speaking about "forgetting of ayah". So if you mean that Allah abrogates ayah in Quran then you have to agree that Allah makes you forget some of ayah of the Quran!!! This is ridiculous.

The words "cause to be forgotten" could not be applicable if the word 'Ayah' in this ayah meant a verse in the Quran. How can a ayah in the Quran become forgotten? For even if the ayah was invalidated by another (as supporters of abrogation falsely claim) it will still be part of the Quran and thus could never be forgotten.

b. In this ayah-in fact-Allah is speaking about previous revelations. Previous revelations were forgotten with the passage of time and its some portion were abrogated by ayah of Quran. Abrogation and forgetting of ayah (With the passage of time previous revelation could not be preserved, hence gradually lost and forgotten)- both can be applied for previous revelation and NOT for Quran. This is simple and logical understanding.

c. The words " *We substitute something better or similar* " would be meaningless if the word 'Ayah' in this verse meant a Quranic verse, simply because it would make no sense for God to invalidate one verse then replace it with one that is identical to it! So actually this ayah is talking about abrogation of ayah (some ayah, not all ayah) of previous revelations. It is not talking about abrogation of quranic ayah.

#### **E. Where we went wrong**

With due respect to our pious scholars - the concept of abrogation propounded is not in sync with Quran. Quran is a miraculous book whose miracles would be revealing from time to time. If we don't understand clearly what an ayah mean then we should say we don't understand its meaning. Instead of this if we declare that this ayah is abrogated by some other ayah then we are moving in wrong direction. If we don't understand something then lets leave it for future

generations. May be - with more and more knowledge with time they will be able to comprehend it better.

For example - think about how number of abrogated ayah decreased from 500 to 20 and then 5. Piety is not necessarily an index of intelligence level of a person. When people pondered more and more over the Quran then they rejected 500 instances of abrogation and *Imam syuti* concluded that only 20 ayah of Quran are abrogated. Imam syuti did not make any mistake by disagreeing with early scholars in the number of instances of abrogation in Quran. He had full right to ponder over Quran and understand it. Similarly when *Shah waliullah dehlavi* disagreed with *Imam syuti* and solved the invalidated abrogation of 15 such ayah then he too did not do any wrong. He concluded that not 20 but actually only 5 ayah of Quran are abrogated. So with the passage of time, with more wisdom, intellectual level and knowledge; muslim world made abrogation instances to be 5. So now if people ponder more over Quran and then they reduce instances of abrogation in Quran to be zero then they are not mistaken as they are trying honestly to do more pondering over Quran. Remember: time and again Quran asks its readers to ponder more and more over Quran.

### E. Prohibition of Alcohol - An example of abrogation?

The best example given in support of abrogation is prohibition of alcohol. People say that Alcohol was prohibited in 3 stages. People misunderstand that initially Quran permitted alcohol consumption, then it asked people not to consume alcohol for some time and then finally Allah prohibited it completely. So - they say - first two ayah of this series are abrogated by the third ayah. Lets analyze it using simple translation and common sense.

a. *They ask you (O Muhammad ﷺ) concerning alcoholic drink and gambling. Say: "In them is a great sin, and (some) benefit for men, but the sin of them is greater than their benefit."... (Quran, Surah baqrah 2:219)*

b. *O you who believe! Approach not As-Salat (the prayer) when you are in a drunken state until you know (the meaning) of what you utter..... (Quran, Surah Nisa 4:43)*

c. *O you who believe! Intoxicants and gambling, and Al-Ansab , and Al-Azlam (arrows for seeking luck or decision) are an abomination of Satan's handiwork. So avoid that, in order that you may be successful. (Quran, Surah Maidah 5:90)*

Traditional understanding is:

1. Quran initially permitted Alcohol. They cite 2:219 and 4:43 for their support.
  2. Later these two ayah were abrogated by 5:90 in which Allah prohibited alcohol.
- This example is the best example of abrogation as per the supporters pf abrogation.

However, a serious and careful understanding of these ayah make clear that none of the ayah is abrogated, none of the ayah contradict with any other one, all 3 ayah can be practised even today. This is the miracle of Quran that its each letter, each word and each sentence is divine.

1. 2:219 says that in alcohol there is some benefit for men, but harm is far more than benefit.

That is true. Human being DO use it in chemical industry, in medicine. In cold countries people drink it to get warmth. It is also used in thermometers, as a solvent, and as a fuel.

Important point to note is that Quran is not saying that Alcohol is permitted for consumption. Had Quran mentioned here that "you can have alcohol" then it would have directly contradicted with 5:90 and then as per 4:82 we could say that Quran is not God's word. But, alhamdulillah, God's word is superior to human misunderstanding.

2. 4:43 says that do not approach for salah when you are in drunken state. Here many people get confused and assume that this ayah means that one can have alcohol when not going for salah. [If A is father of B then that does not always mean B is son of A. B can be daughter of A :) ] They are mistaken. The word of Quran is very balanced. It conveys the meaning, give command and maintain the principle that Quranic ayah can NOT contradict. This ayah is not abrogated and it can be practised even today. Alcohol is prohibited (As per 5:90), yet there would be some bad muslims who would consume alcohol. Just like; zina (illegal physical relation) is prohibited but some people may do zina - that is why we have punishment for those who commit zina. Similarly for people who have consumed alcohol - for them instruction is that if they want to repent through salah or they want to offer salah then they should not go for salah till they are in sound mind, till the intoxicating effect of alcohol has gone. Please note-even in this ayah Allah is not saying at all that alcohol is permitted. This ayah does not contradict with 2:219 and 5:90

3. Finally 5:90 said that Alcohol is prohibited. It does not contradict any ayah; viz 2:219 and 4:43

### Appreciate the beauty of Quran

This is the beauty of quran. Quranic ayah have multiple aspects. On the one hand these 3 ayah were prohibiting the custom of alcohol among arabs. The ayah revealed were perfectly in sync with human psychology. Its difficult for human beings to shun alcohol in one go. In gradual manner it is easier to stop drinking habit.

See how it was relevant that time when it was revealed:

a. 2:219 gave indication to arabs that alcohol has bad effects. Quran told them that even though it has some good yet overall it is bad for human being.

b. Next ayah 4:43 made these arabs to stop alcohol for at least some hours a day. As per this ayah they should not approach salah when in drunken state. So for them that time they were supposed to avoid alcohol for 3-4 hours a day at least. Lets assume that 30 - 45 minutes before salah they should not consume it in order to be in sound state at the time of salah.

c. So with the passage of time people that time had decreased their drinking habit. Many had already shunned. As a last nail in the coffin - 5:90 made clear that it is prohibited. So keeping in the mind the psychological condition of human being these 3 ayah eradicated the evil of alcohol from the society.

These 3 ayah were practised that time by arabs. Even today these 3 ayah are relevant as explained earlier. Hence there is no contradiction in these 3 ayah, there is NO abrogation at all.

**Nothing is abrogated from Quran, not even a letter, not a word, not a sentence.**

## **F. Conclusion**

1. Majority of muslim scholars believe in the concept of abrogation in Quran. It means there are some ayah in the quran which does not hold good today. Its ruling has been cancelled by other particular ayah of the Quran.
2. This concept of abrogation makes Quran a laughing stock in the eyes of non-muslims. How a book that is divine and from Almighty God - can cancel and repeal its command? Is not God Most wise and far sighting?
3. There is difference of opinion among scholars how many and which all ayah of Quran are abrogated. While early scholars pointed out 500 such ayah, *Imam suyuti* narrowed down to 20 and as per *Shah Waliulalh dehlavi* Quran has 5 such ayah that are abrogated. Muslim world is NOT at all unanimous on what all ayah of Quran do not hold good today.
4. With the passage of time-as scholars pondered more and more over the Quran the number of abrogated ayah decreased from 500 to 5. Does not it mean that if we ponder more then this 5 can come down to zero?
5. The concept of abrogation of ayah came into existence because of seemingly contradictory meaning of two ayah. When it is found that two ayah of Quran can not hold true simultaneously then scholars declare one of of ayah to be abrogated. In simple words in order to get rid-off contradictory ayah in quran concept of abrogation was given. I am sorry to say-this understanding / concept is horribly wrong and against Quran, logic and common sense.
6. Quran makes clear that you will not find any two ayah of Quran contradicting. If you believe that Quran contains contradictory ayah then you have to agree that Quran is not from Allah (Surah Nisa 4:82). If there is abrogation in Quran then Quran is not God's word.
7. If someone is unable to decipher the apparent contradiction in Quran then its better to keep silent on the issue rather declaring it abrogated. May be with the passage of time and with more and more pondering over Quran we will understand its clear meaning. In no case Quran can contain contradictory Ayah.
8. A general understanding among muslims is that prohibition of Alcohol, *kalala*, pace making wit non Muslims, inheritance etc - are examples of abrogation. All these ayah can be understood clearly without un-Quranic concept of abrogation.
- 9. Not a single letter, word or ayah of Quran is abrogated.**

*Note: \* If you don't agree with the mail then instead of giving fatwa of deviation / kufr / shirk / biddat - have faith in Allah and leave it to him to judge.*

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