

Surah 2. Al-Baqara

Asad: Any message which We annul or consign to oblivion We replace with a better or a similar one.⁸⁷
Dost thou not know that God has the power to will anything?

Malik: We do not abrogate any of Our verses of the Qur'an or cause it to be forgotten except that We substitute it with something better or similar; don't you know that Allah has full power over everything?

Mustafa Khattab:

If We ever abrogate¹ a verse or cause it to be forgotten, We replace it with a better or similar one. Do you not know that Allah is Most Capable of everything?

Pickthall: Such of Our revelations as We abrogate or cause to be forgotten, we bring (in place) one better or the like thereof. Knowest thou not that Allah is Able to do all things?

Yusuf Ali: None of Our revelations 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? ¹⁰⁷

Transliteration: Ma nansakh min ayatin aw nunsihā nati bikhayrin minhā aw mithlihā alam taAAalam anna Allāha AAalā kulli shayin qadeerun

Author Comments

87 - The principle laid down in this passage - relating to the supersession of the Biblical dispensation by that of the Qur'an - has given rise to an erroneous interpretation by many Muslim theologians. The word ayah ("message") occurring in this context is also used to denote a "verse" of the Qur'an (because every one of these verses contains a message). Taking this restricted meaning of the term ayah, some scholars conclude from the above passage that certain verses of the Qur'an have been "abrogated" by God's command before the revelation of the Qur'an was completed. Apart from the fancifulness of this assertion - which calls to mind the image of a human author correcting, on second thought, the proofs of his manuscript, deleting one passage and replacing it with another - there does not exist a single reliable Tradition to the effect that the Prophet ever declared a verse of the Qur'an to have been "abrogated". At the root of the so-called "doctrine of abrogation" may lie the inability of some of the early commentators to reconcile one Qur'anic passage with another: a difficulty which was overcome by declaring that one of the verses in question had been "abrogated". This arbitrary procedure explains also why there is no unanimity whatsoever among the upholders of the "doctrine of abrogation" as to which, and how many, Qur'an-verses have been affected by it; and, furthermore, as to whether this alleged abrogation implies a total elimination of the verse in question from the context of the Qur'an, or only a cancellation of the specific ordinance or statement contained in it. In short, the "doctrine of abrogation" has no basis whatever in historical fact, and must be rejected. On the other hand, the apparent difficulty in interpreting the above Qur'anic passage disappears immediately if the term ayah is understood, correctly, as "message", and if we read this verse in conjunction with the preceding one, which states that the Jews and the Christians refuse to accept any revelation which might supersede that of the Bible: for, if read in this way, the abrogation relates to the earlier divine messages and not to any part of the Qur'an itself.

The Quran was revealed over a period of twenty-three years. New rules were introduced when the believers were ready to accept and apply them. Replacing a ruling with another is called abrogation (naskh). For example, alcohol consumption was forbidden over three stages (see 2:219, 4:43, and 5:90, respectively). Some of the Prophet's companions said, "If drinking had been forbidden from day one, no one would have accepted Islam!"

107 - The word which I have translated by the word "revelations" is Ayat. See C.41 and n. 15. It is not only used for verses of the Qur-an, but in a general sense for God's revelations, as in ii. 39 and for other Signs of God in history or nature, or miracles, as in ii. 61. It has even been used for human signs and tokens of wonder, as, for example, monuments or landmarks built by the ancient people of Ad (xxvi. 128). What is the meaning here? If we take it in a general sense, it means that God's Message from age to age is always the same, but that its form may differ according to the needs and exigencies of the time. That form was different as given to Moses and then to Jesus and then to Muhammad. Some commentators apply it also to the Ayat of the Qur-an. There is nothing derogatory in this if we believe in progressive revelation. In iii. 7 we are told distinctly about the Qur-an, that some of its verses are basic or fundamental, and others are allegorical, and it is mischievous to treat the allegorical verses and follow them (literally). On the other hand, it is absurd to treat such a verse as ii. 115 as if it were abrogated by ii. 144 about the Qibla. We turn to the Qibla, but we do not believe that God is only in one place. He is everywhere. See second note to ii. 144.

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