

## Fast 22: The doctrine of “abrogation” — 1

- As we have seen, the Quran in chapter 2 had been describing how the Israelites, followers of the law of Moses, had forgotten the true spirit and the real fundamentals of that law. Jesus had come to make the same point to them and to reform them, but his followers later developed other doctrines in conflict with what he taught. The Quran came not only to revive those forgotten, original fundamentals, but also to broaden their application. So, for example, the Being Who in the Bible was called “the Lord God of Israel” is called in the Quran as “Lord of the worlds”.
- Referring to why a new revelation in the form of the Quran was needed, when there already existed earlier revelations, the Quran said:

<p>“Whatever message We abrogate or cause to be forgotten, We bring one better than it or one like it. Do you not know that Allah is Powerful over all things?” — ch. 2, v. 106</p>	<p>مَا نَنْسَخْ مِنْ آيَةٍ أَوْ نُنسِهَا نَأْتِ بِخَيْرٍ مِنْهَا أَوْ مِثْلَهَا أَلَمْ تَعْلَمْ أَنَّ اللَّهَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ ﴿١٠٦﴾</p>
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The “message” referred to here are the revelations brought by previous prophets. The word for “message” here is *āyat*, which is also commonly used to mean “a verse” of the Quran. This led to the development of the wrong idea that some verses of the Quran itself, revealed earlier, were abrogated by other verses revealed later on.

- In Hadith there are reports of Companions of the Holy Prophet Muhammad discussing whether certain verses were abrogated by others, and one Companion expresses one opinion and another contradicts him. From there, as time passed, the theory of abrogation of verses of the Quran, known as *naskh*, became established among Muslims. The abrogating verse was known as *nāsikh* and the one it abrogated was known as *mansūkh*.
- As an illustration of the almost universal acceptance of this theory, I refer to a widely-studied book, published in 1981, *Ulum-ul-Quran: An Introduction to the Sciences of the Quran* by Ahmad Von Denffer. The author, a Muslim, writes that his book “is a descriptive account of the traditional subject of *Ulum-ul-Quran*” and that it presents “the generally-accepted views on the issues”. It has a whole section on abrogation. It is stated in it that knowledge regarding which verses abrogate which others is “one of the important pre-conditions” for explaining the meanings of the Quran and for understanding and applying Islamic law. This subject was traditionally taught as part of Quranic studies, which is why Von Denffer has covered it in his book.
- This theory of abrogation was even applied to the verses relating to fasting as follows. V. 184 of ch. 2 contains the statement:

- “But whoever among you is sick or on a journey, (he shall fast) a (like) number of other days. And those who find it extremely hard may effect redemption by feeding a poor one. ... and that you fast is better for you if you know.”

while the next verse, v. 185, contains the following about the month of Ramadan:

- “So whoever of you is present in the month, he shall fast in it, and whoever is sick or on a journey, (he shall fast) a (like) number of other days.”

In Sahih Bukhari the view is expressed by Ibn Umar that in v. 184 the words “And those who find it extremely hard may effect redemption by feeding a poor one” are abrogated (hadith 1949 and 4506). This is based on taking the words “And those who find it extremely hard” (*wa 'ala-ladhīna yuḥiqūna-hū*) to mean “those who are able to”, and applying them either to those who are *able to fast* or those who are *able to pay* the redemption. It is thought that originally *a choice* was offered, some say it was to the sick and the traveller, and others say it was to everyone, that they may fast, if they wish, or pay a redemption instead. It is said that this choice was then abrogated.

*Note:* In some modern translations of the Quran, the words “those who find it extremely hard” are translated either in the sense of “those who are able (to fast)” or “those who are able (to pay the redemption)”. See for example: Muhammad Asad, Marmaduke Pickthall, Taqi Usmani, and Maulana Maudoodi.

But again in Sahih Bukhari (hadith 4505), we find the renowned Companion Ibn Abbas saying that the words “And those who find it extremely hard may effect redemption by feeding a poor one” are **not abrogated**. He explains that this refers to those who are sick or on a journey during Ramadan, but would find it extremely hard even after Ramadan to make up their missed fasts, such as old men and women. That is the right interpretation. No choice was ever offered to *those who could fast*. It was not offered to everyone generally, nor was it offered to the sick and the traveller in making up the missed fasts unless they found fasting hard even afterwards.

So we see that in Sahih Bukhari, in hadith 4505 Ibn Abbas says that these words are not abrogated and in the very next hadith 4506 Ibn Umar says that they are abrogated!

Apart from this plain contradiction, let us look at what is said to have abrogated this alleged choice. Even those who believe in the abrogation of these words give different explanations. Ibn Umar says this choice was abrogated by v. 185 because it doesn't mention the redemption. The other view quoted in Bukhari is that the last words of v. 184 itself, “and that you fast is better for you if you know”, abrogate the choice.

- This is *an example* of the fact that there is no agreement among Muslim scholars as to which words or verses are abrogated and which words or verses have abrogated them.