

Thoughts On Abrogation? Think About It!

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Assalamu-alaikum wa rahamatullahi wa barakatuhu:

There are some very strange claims on abrogation of a few verses in the Qur'an made at:

<http://www.answering-islam.org.uk/Quran/abrogate.html>

The criticism is as follows:

I hope you see my problem. If God comes to the conclusion that he has to abrogate and make new orders then this is admitting that he made mistakes. It shows that what he gave before was not perfect. It could be improved.

Your scenario accuses God of making mistakes.

But God is all-knowing, he is not surprised by new circumstances and new ideas. It is against the nature and attributes of God to change his mind. And clearly, if God had changed the Qur'an before he revealed it then we would never have known about the change. Because we know the abrogated and abrogating verses [at least some] therefore it is clear that you accuse God not only of changing his mind just for himself, but that he took rather long to find out that it was wrong. After all, the Qur'an is uncreated and was with God for eternity, how come he just found out that some things have to be changed after he revealed it to Muhammad?

To me, this does not make sense. It is derogatory of the holy and supreme God. It attributes mistakes to him and that he didn't know what he was doing in the first place. And then he has to abrogate to clean up the mess of wrong revelation.

That is what I cannot accept.

When one studies the Hebrew and Greek scriptures, it becomes clear that omnipotent and omniscient God did make mistakes and repented. This means that the God did not know his own actions and the outcomes of the actions. Now for some fine examples. Let us first start with Old Testament. In the story of Noah[ؑ], it is mention that:

And the LORD smelled a sweet savour; and the LORD said in his heart, I will not again curse the ground anymore for man's sake; for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; neither will I again smite any more everything living, as I have done. [Genesis 8:21]

And in the story of Moses[Ⓟ], we read

And the LORD repented of the evil which he thought to do unto his people. [Exodus 32:14]

Oh no! that is Old Testament, cries the Christian. The New Testament has replaced all that. Yes, in the New Testament, the monotheistic and henotheistic God of Israel, Yahweh, suddenly starts to be interpreted as Trinity. So, the concept of monotheistic and henotheistic God itself got abrogated in the New Testament as the Christians allege! So we have to assume that the monotheistic and henotheistic God of Israel did not know that he was Trinity and made a serious mistake or he simply changed his mind or in the worst case scenario, he cheated the People of Israel.

The problem just does not end here. Let us also see what are the problems of the Christian cry; **The New Testament has replaced all that**. The following essay is intended to show evidence of the concept of abrogation in the Bible both between the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament) and Greek Scriptures (New Testament) as well as internally in the Greek Scriptures themselves.

To begin - what is meant by the term "abrogation"? The [Concise Oxford Dictionary](#) defines the word **Abrogate** as:

ab-ro-gate: v.tr. repeal, annul, abolish (a law or custom).

In the context of the will and law of God (Holy is He above all that is attributed to Him) as expressed in Scripture, it refers to the nullification of an older Law or concept in favour of a newer and more appropriate one.

We might ask whether an omniscient God, if He is the one who sent Torah and Injeel, might employ such a concept as abrogation? Surely an all-knowing God would be able to impart His will in entirety without recourse to change? Doesn't the idea of abrogating, or nullifying, a previous law in light of a better one suggest that the Author is not all-knowing?

What these questions don't take into account, is that whilst God is all-knowing, unchanging (e.g., Malachi 3:6, with lots of problems with the concept of Trinity), His audience, humanity, is not. The very concept that Christianity holds so dear, of the difference between the old covenantal relationship of law, as opposed to the new covenantal relationship of grace relies on the understanding that human beings as individuals and in human societies are in fact subjected to change in condition.

According to Matthew, Jesus^(P) said:

"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 5:17-19)

And surprising, Jesus^(P), the omniscient Yahweh incarnate (allegedly!) suddenly had to [change the Laws of Divorce](#), [Justice](#) and [Oaths](#) apart from [changing his own mind!](#)

Abrogation Of Divorce

The best examples of Jesus^(P) abrogating parts of Old Testament law concern a number of statements recorded in the gospel according to Matthew. The most prominent of them would be the Law concerning Divorce.

In the Old Testament we find the following law concerning divorce:

If a man marries a woman who becomes displeasing to him because he finds something indecent about her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house, and if after she leaves his house she becomes the wife of another man, (Deutonomy 24:1-2)

Now without going into the minute of this particular law of divorce, one thing becomes immediately clear. Not only is divorce permitted by God, it is legal for her to remarry.

However in the time of Jesus^(P), the rules of divorce seem to have taken a U-turn.

"It has been said, 'Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.' But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery. (Matthew 5:31-32)

Here Jesus^(P) abrogated the former permission to divorce according to the husband's displeasure and strictly allowed it under one condition - adultery. He even went so far as to legislate that divorcees were not permitted to remarry, clearly abrogating the former permission. But what is the reason given for this abrogation? Had God changed His mind? Is this evidence of God not being omniscient? Or more importantly, is this evidence that in fact God was never the author of these laws? Well Jesus^(P) himself explains:

"Why then," they asked, "did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?" Jesus replied, "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning. I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery." (Matthew 19:7-9)

Jesus^(p) points to the fact that God designs laws that are suitable to the needs and exigencies of the time and audience.

Law Of Absolute Justice

In the Hebrew Scriptures it is written:

Show no pity: life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot. (Deutonomy 19:21)

Quite a harsh law of absolute justice that was necessary due to the conditions of Moses'^(p) age. But Jesus^(p) was inspired by God to reveal a softer code for the believers to practice in individual relationships. By abrogating the harshness of absolute justice, Jesus^(p) was inspired to encourage the believers to employ forgiveness and mercy. It is recorded he said:

"You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you. (Matthew 5:38-42)

It is a different story that many Christians do not practice what Jesus^(p) has told them to do.

Law Of Oaths

We read:

If you make a vow to the LORD your God, do not be slow to pay it, for the LORD your God will certainly demand it of you and you will be guilty of sin. But if you refrain from making a vow, you will not be guilty. Whatever your lips utter you must be sure to do, because you made your vow freely to the LORD your God with your own mouth. (Deutonomy 23:21-23)

That is, it is permissible to make an oath for various reasons, however, the swearer must fulfil the oath he makes. In Jesus' time it became necessary for him to abrogate this permission so that the swearing of oaths became forbidden. In Matthew it is recorded:

"Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not break your oath, but keep the oaths you have made to the Lord.' But I tell you, Do not swear at all: either by heaven, for it is God's throne; or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. Simply let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one. (Matthew 5:33-37)

Jesus^(p) Abrogating His Own Commandments

Perhaps the clearest example of God inspiring Jesus^(p) to practice abrogation can be seen in the commissioning of his disciples. It is written in the New Testament that initially Jesus^(p) forbade his disciples from preaching to non-Jews. He restricted their activities and commanded them to avoid Gentiles. However, due to the change in circumstances and the completion of his earthly mission, Jesus^(p) abrogated this earlier law and made it not only permissible but obligatory for his disciples to reach out to a broader base.

A nice example of Jesus^(p) asking his disciples to preach the lost sheep of Israel is:

These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: "Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel. (Matthew 10:5-6)

This prohibition is reinforced by Jesus^(p)' own practice:

A Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to him, crying out, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is suffering terribly from demon-possession." Jesus did not answer a word. So his disciples came to him and urged him, "Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us." He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel." (Matthew 15:22-24)

Even though because of his mercy Jesus^(p) healed the sick daughter, he made it clear that his mission was to the Jews, not to the Gentiles. Later on this was abrogated and Jesus^(p) commanded his disciples to reach out to all peoples. It is recorded he said:

Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (Matthew 28:18-20)

Conclusions

It is clear that the concept of abrogation: the nullifying of an older commandment or practice in favour of a newer law, is nothing new and it has been practiced by God for aeons. What we know is that the laws governing the mankind (*i.e., Shariah*) changes according to the needs of the society. But the concept of monotheism (*i.e., Tawheed*) remains the same. The Creator knows very well that his creation, the humans, need time and discipline to grow and mature, He reveals commandments and practices that help them develop both as individuals and as members of society. All Praise be to the God, Lord of the Worlds.

And Allah knows best.