

What About ... Abrogation And Its Impact on Interpreting the Koran?

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“Abrogate: to abolish by formal or official means; annul by an authoritative act; repeal; to put aside; put an end to” (Dictionary.com)

The Koran is, in strict literal fact, the book of god for the Muslim. Mohammed was Allah’s prophet, divulging phrase-by-phrase the final and fullest revelation of Allah’s will to man. This divine will was revealed between A.D. 613-632. The earlier revelations first came in Mecca, and later revelations came in Medina. They determined the ideal human society that was most pleasing to Allah for the Muslim.

As Muslims began to exegete the Koran, they discovered a number of contradictions within its verses. One major contradiction included which direction a Muslim faced to bow and pray. At one time, the Koran said it was Jerusalem, but later it was changed to Mecca. Another significant contradiction was the number of fighting men necessary to defeat infidels. At one time, the Koran declared that twenty steadfast Muslim warriors can vanquish two hundred infidels and a hundred can rout a thousand unbelievers. Later, Mohammed said Allah had lightened their burden, so now a hundred steadfast men can vanquish two hundred

infidels and a thousand warriors can defeat two thousand unbelievers. So Allah changed the odds, increasing their chance for victory.

The greatest example of contradiction concerns Jihad or Holy War. There are 124 verses in the Koran that call for tolerance, compassion, and peace. These verses counsel patience in the face of mockery and insults from unbelievers. All of these verses were revealed earlier in Mecca, when Mohammed was consolidating his power. Later, the Koran contradicted these ‘peace’ verses with revelations of Jihad against infidels, when Mohammed was at his greatest strength in Medina. These later Medinan verses declare brutality, butchery, and death toward all unbelievers. A key verse called the ‘sword-verse’ in K.9:5 sweeps away all of the earlier ‘peace’ verses, replacing them with Jihad by declaring, “But when the forbidden months are past, then fight and slay the Pagans wherever you find them, and seize them and beleaguer them and lie in wait for them in every stratagem of war...”

The theory of abrogation resolves the dilemma of contradiction within the Koran for the Muslim. Abrogation means that the later revelations Mohammed received supersede and replace the earlier ones. The Koran itself establishes abrogation in K.2:106, stating that “When we cancel a message, or throw it into

oblivion, we replace it with one better or one similar. Do you not know that God has power over all things?” Based on this and other verses, Allah declared null and void his earlier pronouncements. An earlier verse is either canceled or improved upon by a later revelation. Allah chose to reveal a verse that supersedes an earlier one in the same Koran.

All of the “war” verses came during Mohammed’s later revelations. Many of them came during the latter part of his later revelations, and they abrogate, cancel, and replace all of the earlier verses calling for tolerance, compassion, and peace. Chapter 9 contains the last verses spoken by Mohammed and has the largest amount of violent passages. Fighting against unbelievers and imposing an Islamic social order over the world was now made obligatory for the Muslim. This obligation is bound up with abrogation, as earlier revelations of peace gave way to later ones of war.

Today, so-called radical Muslims are actually orthodox, since they correctly understand that even though the Koran teaches peace and tolerance, this has been superseded by and replaced with jihad and holy war against all non-Muslims until an Islamic social world order is established.

