

*Al-Fawz al-Kabīr
fī Uṣūl at-Tafsīr*

The Great Victory
on Qur'ānic Hermeneutics

of

Shāh Waliyyullāh

Quṭbuddīn Aḥmad ibn 'Abdurrahīm
al-Muḥaddith ad-Dihlawī
(1114 AH/1703 CE – 1176 AH/1762 CE)

A Manual of the Principles
and Subtleties of Qur'ānic Tafsīr

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Chapter 2



Abrogating (*Nāsikh*) and Abrogated (*Mansūkh*) *Āyāt*

Recognition of the abrogating and the abrogated *āyāt* of the Noble Qur’ān is such an arduous task in the science of *tafsīr* that many discussions and numerous disagreements have taken place in it. The most significant reason for these difficulties is the different terminologies of the early and the later scholars.

The Meaning of Abrogation for the Early Generations

In this regard, research into the statements of the Companions and the Successors tells us that they used the word ‘*naskh* (abrogation)’ in the literal sense: “the removal of one thing by another”, and not in the sense used by the theoreticians of commentary; they termed *naskh* “the replacement of some of the characteristics of a particular *āyah* by another *āyah*” whether that was:

- by explaining [that it was] the coming to an end of the period of practice;
- by directing discussion from its most likely meaning to a less likely meaning;
- by explaining the fact that the restriction is conventional;
- or because of the particularisation of a general text;

- by explaining the difference between the text and what was treated literally as analogous to it;
- the removal of customs from the *jābiliyyah*;
- the removal of the laws of a previous *sharī'ah*.

NUMBER OF ABROGATED *ĀYĀT*

According to Earlier Scholars

According to these scholars, *naskh* was a large category as was the scope for intellect and the possibilities for differences of opinion. Thus, the number of abrogated *āyāt* amounted to five hundred in their view. A little more consideration, however, leads one to discover that they are countless. But as for the *āyāt* that are considered abrogated according to the definition of later scholars they do not amount to more than a few, especially when seen in the light of the explanation that we have adopted.

According to Later Scholars

Shaykh Jalāl ad-Dīn as-Suyūṭī, having studied the views of some scholars regarding what we have mentioned above, has presented an appropriately detailed explanation about them in his book *al-Itqān* and then he enumerated the abrogated *āyāt* according to the views of later scholars in accordance with the view of Shaykh [Abū Bakr] Ibn al-‘Arabī,¹⁸³ who counted them as approximately twenty *āyāt*. However, with regards to most of those twenty *āyāt*, this needy man (*faqīr*) has a further difference of opinion. So we will take [Imām Jalāl ad-Dīn as-Suyūṭī’s] sayings with our observations on them:

183 He is Abū Bakr Muḥammad ibn ‘Abdullāh al-Ma‘āfirī (468 AH/1076 CE – 543 AH/1148 CE), the famous Andalusian jurist of the Mālikī school. Amongst other works, he authored the popular legal Qur’anic *tafsīr*, *Aḥkām al-Qur’ān*.

Sūrat al-Baqarah (2)

1. His ﷺ words:

كُتِبَ عَلَيْكُمْ إِذَا حَضَرَ أَحَدَكُمُ الْمَوْتُ

“It is prescribed for you,
when death approaches one of you”¹⁸⁴

are abrogated, some say by the *āyah* of inheritance,¹⁸⁵ while others have said that they are abrogated by the *ḥadīth*:

لَا وَصِيَّةَ لَوَارِثٍ

“There is no bequest for an heir [since he has an obligatory fixed share].”¹⁸⁶

Some have said that the Qur’ānic *āyah* is abrogated through scholarly consensus (*ijmā’*) as cited by Ibn al-‘Arabī. I say that, on the contrary, this *āyah* is abrogated by the *āyah*:

يُوصِيكُمُ اللَّهُ فِي أَوْلَادِكُمْ

“Allah instructs you regarding your children”¹⁸⁷

As for the *ḥadīth*: لَا وَصِيَّةَ لَوَارِثٍ – “There is no bequest for an heir [since he has an obligatory fixed share]” – it only explains this abrogation.

2. It is said that the Qur’ānic *āyah*:

184 Qur’ān, Sūrat al-Baqarah 2:180.

185 Qur’ān, Sūrat an-Nisā’ 4:11-12.

186 Al-Bukhārī, *al-Jāmi’ aṣ-Ṣaḥīḥ*, *Kitāb al-Waṣāyā*, chapter 6, *ḥadīth* 2747; Abū Dāwūd, *as-Sunan*, *Kitāb al-Waṣāyā*, chapter *Mā Jā’a fi’l-Waṣiyyati li’l-Wārith*, *ḥadīth* 2870; also reported by at-Tirmidhī, *al-Jāmi’ al-Kabīr*, *Kitāb al-Waṣāyā*, chapter *Mā Jā’a Lā Waṣiyyata li-Wārith*; *ḥadīth* 2120; etc.

187 Qur’ān, Sūrat an-Nisā’ 4:11.

وَعَلَى الَّذِينَ يُطِيقُونَهُ فِدْيَةٌ

“For those who are able to fast [but with difficulty], their *fidyah*”¹⁸⁸
is abrogated by the *āyah*:

فَمَنْ شَهِدَ مِنْكُمُ الشَّهْرَ فَلْيَصُمْهُ

“Any of you who are resident for the month should fast it.”¹⁸⁹

It is also said that this *āyah* is a decisive (*muḥkam*) *āyah*, and that the word لَا – “not” – is omitted but implicitly understood within it (i.e. “For those who are [not] able to fast...”). I say that there is another reason, and that is that the former *āyah*:

وَعَلَى الَّذِينَ يُطِيقُونَ الطَّعَامَ فِدْيَةٌ

meaning that ‘those people who are capable of feeding others, they are liable to provide the ransom, which is feeding a needy person’ and so He ﷻ used the pronoun before mentioning [the noun] because it takes precedence in rank and He ﷻ put the pronoun here in the masculine gender because the ransom is referring to the food.¹⁹⁰ The food here indicates the *ṣadaqat al-fiṭr* (incumbent *ṣadaqah* paid on ‘Īd al-Fiṭr). In this *āyah*, Allah ﷻ has mentioned *ṣadaqat al-fiṭr* after the command to fast [in the month of Ramaḍān] just as He gave the command to proclaim His greatness on the day of ‘Īd [in the *āyah*: وَلِتُكَبِّرُوا اللَّهَ عَلَىٰ مَا وَلَّيْتُمْ

188 Qur’ān, Sūrat al-Baqarah 2:184.

189 Qur’ān, Sūrat al-Baqarah 2:185.

190 The word فِدْيَةٌ (ransom) is in the feminine gender whereas the word الطَّعَامَ (food) is masculine; its pronoun ought to be similar to it in gender, number, state, etc. and hence the use of the masculine pronoun هُ – which refers to a masculine noun, its antecedent.

you”¹⁹¹ after the portion of the *āyah*: *فَن شَهْد مِنْكُمْ الشَّهْرَ فَلْيَصُمْهُ* “Any of you who are resident for the month should fast it.”¹⁹²].

3. His ﷺ words:

أَحِلَّ لَكُمْ لَيْلَةَ الصِّيَامِ الرَّفَثُ إِلَى نِسَائِكُمْ

“On the night of the fast it is lawful for you to have sexual relations with your wives”¹⁹³

have abrogated the *āyah*:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا كُتِبَ عَلَيْكُمُ الصِّيَامُ
كَمَا كُتِبَ عَلَى الَّذِينَ مِن قَبْلِكُمْ

“You who believe! fasting is prescribed for you, as it was prescribed for those before you”¹⁹⁴

which ought necessarily to require conformity with the [practice of] previous nations for whom eating, drinking and conjugal relationships were forbidden at night after sleeping. Ibn al-‘Arabī states this, and he has also mentioned that the former *āyah* abrogates the proscription of conjugal relationships which had previously been Sunnah. I say that the words:

كَمَا كُتِبَ

“As it was prescribed”

is striking a simile about the obligation of fasting and so there is no abrogation here. This is because it only changes their practice

191 Qur’ān, Sūrat al-Baqarah 2:185.

192 Qur’ān, Sūrat al-Baqarah 2:185.

193 Qur’ān, Sūrat al-Baqarah 2:187.

194 Qur’ān, Sūrat al-Baqarah 2:183.

prior to the promulgation of the *shari'ah*. We find no evidence that the Prophet ﷺ had ever made that [abstinence from sexual relations at night during the fast] *shari'ah* for them. If we accept that, then that was only by the Sunnah [and not Divine command].

4. His ﷺ words:

يَسْأَلُونَكَ عَنِ الشَّهْرِ الْحَرَامِ قِتَالٍ فِيهِ

“They will ask you about the Sacred Month and fighting in it”¹⁹⁵
are abrogated by the *āyah*:

وَقَاتِلُوا الْمُشْرِكِينَ كَافَّةً كَمَا يُقَاتِلُونَكُمْ كَافَّةً

“However, fight the idolators totally just as they fight you totally.”¹⁹⁶

The relevant narration regarding this abrogation is mentioned by Ibn Jarīr¹⁹⁷ on the authority of ‘Aṭā’ ibn Maysarah.¹⁹⁸

I say that this *āyah* does not refer to the prohibition of fighting but rather to its permissibility, and it presents the reason but shows the obstacle. Thus, this *āyah* means ‘though fighting a war during the Sacred Months is extremely serious, nevertheless, the mischief [of disbelief (*kufṛ*) and association of partners with Allah (*shirk*)] is worse, and hence, consequently it is permitted’. This meaning is evident from the context itself as it is not hidden.

195 Qur’ān, Sūrat al-Baqarah 2:217.

196 Qur’ān, Sūrat at-Tawbah 9:36.

197 He is Abū Ja’far Muḥammad ibn Jarīr at-Ṭabarī (224 AH/838 CE – 310 AH/922 CE). He was one of the earliest historians and commentators of the Qur’ān. He authored *Tārīkh ar-Rusul wa’l-Mulūk* (The History of the Messengers and Kings) also known as *Tārīkh at-Ṭabarī* in history, *Jāmi’ al-Bayān fī Ta’wīl al-Qur’ān* (The Comprehensive Exposition in the Interpretation of the Qur’ān) in Qur’ānic *tafsīr*, and *Tahdhīb al-Āthār* (Collection of Reports) – a book of traditions that remained incomplete.

198 ‘Aṭā’ ibn al-Maysarah (d. 134 AH/751 CE) was one of the Successors.