

Thoughts on Abrogation

A Muslim said in response to somebody who claimed that abrogation is distortion:

To the person who commented that abrogation by Allah of his own words is distortion. Let me ask you. Suppose you are a manager and wanted to issue an order to your employees, and then gave it to your secretary to type it. She added and removed words so we can call her act a distortion of your original order. Now suppose that you wrote an order but then you added and removed text from your order before you hand it to your sec. can any body claim that you distorted something? Of course not! because it is still original coming from you as far as the secretary and the rest of the company are concerned. And to Allah belong the best parables.

I like your parable. And I like parables in general since they can make things often so much clearer than abstract reasoning. But there is a theological difficulty with this scenario.

I don't have a problem if a manager changes his mind and changes an order. He may do so either before or after he handed it to the secretary. In either case it is his authority to change it and nobody will question him about it.

But the manager is human and as such makes error. Why would he change the order? Because he realized that he made a mistake. Maybe a big mistake, maybe only a small mistake. But certainly he recognized he can improve on what ordered before and that is the reason he changes it.

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.

Further articles on abrogation are found at the [Index to Islam](#) and the overview page to the [Qur'an section](#).

The above article has resulted in a follow up discussion.

A Muslim response [\[1\]](#) and two detailed Christian responses [\[1, 2\]](#) to the Muslim evasion.
