

## ABROGATION

### NASKH

This article comprises the following sections: i. Definitions; ii. Wisdom; iii. Modalities; iv. Prerequisites of Abrogator and Abrogated; v. Legal Scenarios; vi. Some Disputed Criteria; vii. Mutual Abrogability of Qurʾān and Sunna; viii. Some Constants of Abrogation; ix. Scholarly Literature; x. Islam's Abrogation of Prior Dispensations; xi. al-Suyūṭī's List of Intra-Qurʾānic Abrogations; xii. Bibliography.

### Definitions

*Naskh* lexically denotes elimination (*izāla*), as in the verse *but Allah annuls (yansakhu) what Satan casts, then Allah confirms His signs* (Q 22:52); substitution (*tabdīl*), as in the verse *and when We exchange (baddalnā) one revelation (āya) in place of another revelation (āya)* (Q 16:101) in light of the verse *We do not erase (nansakh) any revelation (āya) or cause it to be forgotten (nunsihā) but bring a better one or the like of it* (Q 2:106); transfer (*tahwīl*), as in the *tanāsukh* of inheritance, meaning its transfer from one person to another; and copy or transcript (*naql*) from one place to another, as in the verses *We have been recording (nastansikhu) all that you were doing* (Q 45:29) and *he took the tablets, and in their record (nuskhatihā) there was guidance and mercy for those who fear their Lord* (Q 7:154), and as implied in the verse *Lo! in the Motherbook, which We possess, it is indeed sublime, full of wisdom* (Q 43:4).

In legal theory and exegesis *naskh* denotes the “cessation and change” (*al-rafʿ wal-taghyīr*) of an early legal ruling (*sharʿ, hukm sharʿī*)—the *mansūkh* or “abrogated”—and its replacement (though not indispensable, see next Section) by a later one—the *nāsikh* or “abrogator,” also called “substitute” (*badal*)—per ‘Alam al-Dīn al-Sakhāwī (558-643/1163-1245) and al-Shawkānī's (1173-1250/1759-1834) definitions (*Tawd* 1:335 and *Irshād* 2:787, respectively); or the injunction (*khitāb*) pertaining thereunto, per the two definitions given by (i) al-Juwaynī (419-478/1028-1085), al-Ghazālī (450-505/1058-1111), and Ibn al-ʿArabī (468-543/1075-1148) as in the former's *Waraqāt* (al-Maḥallī's *Sharḥ*, p. 50), the second's *Mustasfā* (1:107) and al-Rāzī's (543-606/1148-1209) *Maḥṣūl* (3:282): “The injunction indicating the cessation of a ruling established by a prior injunction, in a sense were it not for which the prior one would remain established, with

an interval of time between the two” (which is actually the definition of the *nāsikh* as pointed out by al-Sakhāwī, *Tawd* 1:335 and al-Maḥallī, *Sharḥ*, p. 50) and (ii) al-Rāzī himself (*Maḥṣūl* 3:285): “An avenue of the Law indicating that the ruling that was established by a prior avenue is no longer existent thenceforth, with an interval of time between the two, in a sense were it not for which the prior avenue would remain established.” (The interval of time is necessary, otherwise there would be simultaneity and the second injunction would be an exposition of the first rather than an abrogation.) *Naskh* therefore takes place only in the lifetime of the Prophet—upon him blessings and peace—as “there is no more abrogation after the termination of revelation” and, furthermore, the true abrogator is Allah Himself, although the name of abrogator is metaphorically applied to the proof (e.g., a verse) or the substitute ruling by which *naskh* is established (al-Ghazālī, *al-Mustasfā* 1:126, 1:121).

### Wisdom

*Naskh* is mostly (though not necessarily, see “Legal Scenarios” below) about ease and can be exemplified by the gradual lessening of the Divinely-imposed duty of 50 daily prayers to five in the account of the Prophet's Heavenly Ascension (see NIGHT JOURNEY AND ASCENSION) (Bukhārī, *Tawḥīd, qawluḥi wa-kallama Allāhu Mūsā taklīman*; Muslim, *Īmān, al-isrāʾ bi-Rasūl Allāh*). The latter gradation is similar to the three-tiered prohibition of intoxicating substances in the Qurʾān (Q 4:43 then 2:219 then 5:90-91) although the latter is in fact a case of abrogation leading to a more stringent ruling, such as the replacement of pacifism with combat to the point of standing firm even at ten to one odds (Q 8:65)—then two to one (Q 8:66)—and the obligation of fasting in replacement of free choice between a makeup fast and feeding the poor (Q 2:184-185 cf. al-Ghazālī, *al-Mustasfā* 1:120). Thus, a primary wisdom behind *naskh* is the gradual development of the community of the believers: certain rulings were appropriate at initial stages and were later made obsolete, but remain as an indication of the Divine mercy in implementing a gradual rather than a sudden and brutal process of development.

*Naskh* does not imply a Divine “change of mind” (*badāʾ*)—an absurdity (Ibn al-Jawzī, *Nawāsiḥ*, p. 83)—for “the Almighty Creator has known from pre-eternity the former and the latter command, the duration of the former, and the start of the latter, all before the existence of His creatures and their being tasked with that, then the other; and He, since pre-eternity, has wanted the