

# Have the peaceful verses of the Qur'ān been abrogated?



<https://www.whyislam.org/misconceptions/peacefulverses/>

**Justin Parrott (Abu Amina Elias)**

*In the name of Allah, the Gracious, the Merciful*

Advocating violent conquest or terrorism is one of the most common accusations against Islam, but it is also deeply uninformed of Islamic teachings, history, and theology. Muslims can point to many, many verses in the Qur'an to debunk the

myth, like the verse, “If they incline to peace, then incline to it as well and put your trust in God.” The early Muslims fought a defensive war of survival against an enemy determined to exterminate the new religion, but even then, God commanded them to make peace if possible. The Prophet (peace be upon him) himself said, “Verily, after me, there will be conflicts or affairs, so if you are able to end them in peace, then do so.”<sup>1</sup> If Islam is a religion of peace, how is it misrepresented?

A key concept in Qur’anic exegesis is called “abrogation”. It refers to the phenomena of a later verse altering or replacing the rule of a previous verse. The clearest example is the gradual prohibition of alcohol, which was permissible at first, then it was discouraged (2:219), then it was prohibited to come to [prayer](#) intoxicated (4:43), and finally it was completely prohibited (5:90). The wisdom in this sequence is that, since most people cannot quit “cold turkey,” alcohol needs to be tapered off. Hence, the final ruling of alcohol prohibition “abrogated” the previous rules. Have the rules of war in the Qur’an been abrogated in the same way?

Anti-Muslim writers, and some extremist Muslims, make the far-fetched claim that all verses in the Qur’an encouraging peace, mercy, and fairness with non-Muslims have been abrogated by the so-called “verse of the sword”. The verse reads, “When the sacred months have passed, kill the idolaters wherever you find them,” (9:5) but rarely do they finish the verse, “If they repent, perform prayer, and give charity, let them go their way, for God is forgiving and merciful.” The entire passage discusses the hostile Arab tribes who “broke their treaty” and “attacked you first” (9:13). It also offers immunity to any enemy who “seeks your protection” and, regardless of whether they accept Islam or not, to “deliver him to his place of safety” (9:6). To think one sentence from a verse cancels hundreds of verses before it, as well as around it, is quite a stretch. Qur’anic scholar M.A.S. Abdul Haleem states, “The whole of this context to verse 9:5, with all its restrictions, is ignored by those who simply isolate one part of a sentence to build on it their theory of violence in Islam.”<sup>2</sup>

Some scholars of the classical period did say the verse of the sword abrogates many verses before it, but what did they mean by that? Abrogation itself is a very nuanced topic, as the word has been used to mean everything from a complete repeal to a narrowly limited exception. Types of partial abrogation came to be known as ‘specification’ (*takhsis*), ‘restriction’ (*taqyid*), ‘explanation’ (*tafsir*), ‘clarification’ (*tabyin*), ‘exceptional’ (*istithna*), and ‘conditional’ (*shart*).<sup>3</sup> The previous rule was changed or “abrogated” to account for a new situation, but it was not nullified, invalidated, or canceled entirely. Scholars who said a verse was abrogated did not mean it was cancelled. Even then, many classical scholars such as Abu Ja’far al-Nahhas (d. 949), Ibn al-Jawzi (d. 1201), and Al-Suyuti (d.

1505) only accepted about twenty cases of genuine abrogation in the Qur'an, none of which involved the verse or verses of the sword.<sup>4</sup>

The primary verse laying down the rules of war states, "Fight in the way of God against those who fight you, but do not transgress. Verily, [God](#) does not love transgressors."<sup>5</sup> Was this verse abrogated? Ibn Abbas (d. 687), the cousin of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), did not think so. He stated that the verse outlaws killing "women, children, old men, or whoever comes to you with peace and he restrains his hand [from fighting],"<sup>6</sup> or in other words, it means it is unlawful to harm civilians and non-combatants. In fact, most Muslim scholars throughout history agreed with him. The classical scholar Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 1328) wrote at length to rebut the claim that this verse had been nullified, "This opinion [that the verse 2:190 is not abrogated] is the opinion of the majority of scholars... Indeed, to claim abrogation requires proof and there is nothing in the Qur'an to contradict this verse. Rather, what is in the Qur'an is consistent with it, so where is the abrogating verse?"<sup>7</sup>

Ibn Taymiyyah's view is supported by the statement of the Prophet (peace be upon him), "Verily, the most tyrannical of people to God Almighty is one who kills those who did not fight him."<sup>8</sup> There has never been any justification in Islam, from its inception until today, to kill or harm people because of their religion. Islam only allows violence as a self-defensive response to aggression or to put an end to the persecution of innocent people, Muslims and non-Muslims alike.

Wahbah al-Zuhayli (d. 2015), a leading modern scholar on Islamic international law, summarizes the majority view in his commentary on the Qur'an:

*The lesson derived from this verse 2:190 and others related to the legislated conditions of warfare and the permissible rulings in jihad are as follows:*

*1) Warfare is legislated in the cause of Allah to repel aggression, protect preaching Islam, and freedom of divine religion.*

*2) This legislation is characterized by justice and truth, in which there is no transgression against anyone, nor overlooking what is necessary in war. The aim is not to demolish and tear down, nor merely to terrorize. Thus, non-combatants are not killed, nor are women, children, and those like them among monks, the disabled, the sick, and the elderly. Crops and fruits are not razed, nor are animals slaughtered except for food, as has come in the prophetic instructions and those of the righteous Caliphs.*

*3) Warfare is not for compelling people to embrace Islam, as that would defeat the principal ruling of the Qur'an in many verses.<sup>9</sup>*

The claim that the Qur'an commands Muslims to murder non-believers is simply false. Warfare, or jihad, can only be conducted under strict circumstances and for a just cause, as has been detailed by scholars. Rather, Islam teaches us to be kind, fair, and compassionate to all people, as God said in the Qur'an, "We have not sent you, O Muhammad, but as mercy for the worlds." (21:107)

*Success comes from Allah, and Allah knows best.*