

Episode 21

Muhammad's testimony + introduction to the abrogation.

Mohamed: *Dear viewers, we welcome you to a new episode in the program, "Questions About Faith".*

It is my pleasure as the presenter of the program, Mohamed Saeed, to accompany you in the following episodes with our honorable guest, Priest Zakaria Botros. You are most welcome.

Father: Thank you

Mohamed: Dear viewers, before beginning I would like to introduce myself. I grew up in a Muslim family, leaned Islam and studied in an Islamic school, in a certain Arab country. Ever since I was a little child, my mother instilled in my heart one of the most important things, which is to love God. Even as a child, I had such yearning and passion for God Most High. I had such a strong desire to please God and obey Him and be in the center of His will. As an adult I traveled to many countries. Also, as I was growing up, I tried as much as I could to apply all the Muslim teachings of prayer and fasting, and so on. During my travels as well, I traveled to Saudi Arabia I had such an interest to visit Mecca and El Kaaba, where I also prayed and sought God's face. Later in life, I met a Christian friend who began to tell me about Christ, and also and he told me about salvation, as well as condemnation and sin. All these things were new to me. I had never thought about them before. This friend started to share with me some things from the Bible, the Holy Gospel (Injeel). I am going to read now some of the most impressive verses that touched my heart. They are in the Gospel according to Matthew Chapter 5. Christ said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted, blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they shall be filled. Blessed are the merciful

for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God. Blessed are the peace makers for they shall be called the sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you." And I was touched by the words: "be called the sons of God".

This got me to think, "Can I ever be a son of God?" I always thought that I am God's slave. I always thought of God as the sovereign, the holy, the powerful, the compeller, the magnificent, the mercy giving, the merciful but this man started to tell me that God is love, or rather that God is the Love. After 3 years of dialogue and searching that involved a lot of difficulty and hard times, I truly came my dear viewers, to seek the truth, God Himself. I said to God, "Lord, You are the truth and I want to know You." God Himself dealt with me through His Spirit, and I came to acknowledge the truth, that I am a sinful man and that a sinful man, cannot stand in God's presence because God is absolutely Holy and we, His creatures, are by nature sinful, therefore we are spiritually dead and separated from God on account of our sinfulness. I asked God: "How can I be reconciled to You?" And the answer came to me only through Christ. This might be difficult for you. It was difficult for me. But Christ says, "Come to me all you who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest." He also said, "If you believe with your heart and confess with your mouth that Jesus Christ is Lord you will be saved."

Dear friends, all these words were difficult for me as a Muslim. I continually prayed to God. I would kneel down and bow down on my knees and ask Him to help me understand, and ask for salvation as well. I searched for my salvation, my salvation from sin, from condemnation and I had a holy desire for my name to be written in the Book of Life. I came to know the person of Jesus Christ. I received Him as the personal

Savior of my life. And I believe now, my dear brothers, that my name is written in the Book of Life. It is our heartfelt desire and our prayer through these programs, to communicate to you the Biblical truth.

Now we welcome you, Reverend.

In the previous episode of the program, you have discussed the issue of abrogation in the Quran. And this issue aroused a lot of interest to the point that some newspapers started to write about it. But what is said on that topic was brief and short and it aroused the curiosity of people to know a bit more. Do you have more to say about this serious topic in order to satisfy the interest of the viewers?

We have received many questions. One of the questions is, "As you talked about the abrogating and the abrogated verses in the Quran before, would you please summarize for the viewers who may not have watched the previous episodes, before we go on to other topics."

Father: Thank you very much. Truly, the program has had an impact on the public opinion. I received many letters through the internet and through the newspapers and through the magazines. For example, this magazine called Al Esboua "The week" on the 19th of January, 2004, on page 2. In an article on the 2nd page, the editor says. He first mentions the name of the guest in this program, which was myself, and that the topic was the abrogating and the abrogated verses. In his comment he says, " This topic is difficult and complicated and many of the Islamic legalese scholars avoid it, therefore I made up my mind to follow the program completely. I was rather attracted by the idea that a priest tackled this issue."

The viewers would like to know so many things because God created man with a mind. This is the characteristic that marks man from other unintelligent animals. Man must use his mind, man would like to know and understand, and he wants to reach the truth. But there is no one to talk about the truth exactly as the editor said, that Muslim scholars avoid talking about such difficult topics. I wish that our beloved Muslim scholars would

have filled the gap for others, but I thank the Lord for Al Hayat TV, which gives us the chance to talk about such subjects. When I am talking about this subject, I'm not talking out of curiosity; it is rather an essential part of religious dialogue.

Mohamed: Why do we talk about abrogation?

Father: As a matter of fact, in the previous episodes we tackled the issue of abrogation because it had to do with a question about contradictions or discrepancies in the Bible. The inquirer posed the question... as this is a program about questions about the faith, he has all the freedom to ask... The inquirer said, the Bible has contradictions, and we are only trying to answer him. The Bible, as we know very well, has no contradictions. It may appear that there are contradictions, but when one studies the verses in context, each one in turn, contradiction just disappears. For example, someone said there is this event of transfiguration. In one gospel it says that it took place after 6 days, and at another place it says that it happened after 8 days, and they say this is an obvious contradiction. Did it take place after 6 or after 8 days? But when we analyze it properly, we find that in the first instance the writer did not count the day on which Jesus made the statement, neither did he count the day of transfiguration itself, so there were 6 days left in between. The other evangelist counted the day on which Jesus was transfigured and the day on which the statement was made, and this made 8 days in total. These are all apparent contradictions. But in depth, study would show us what originally happened. By the same token, we received questions about the contradictions in the Quran, and these contradictions were given the name of abrogated and abrogating. Questions. Therefore I had to study the subject.

Mohamed: What does the word abrogation mean?

Father: As a matter of fact, abrogation has 2 meanings: A lingual meaning and a technical meaning.

Lingually, it means to cancel out and abolish. There is another meaning, which is to copy, for example, copy a book. As to the technical meaning, however, this has been the field of study of many Muslim scholars, and in this respect I only tell what they said I don't give myself the right to give legal opinion or fatwa. So let me tell you what Ibn Katheer said quoting Ibn Gareer, Ibn Katheer says in his commentary, volume 1 page 104, commenting on the verse that says: "We do not cancel any verse nor let it be forgotten .. and so on. He says, "to cancel" means "to turn that which is legal into that which is illegal, and that which is illegal into that which is legal, to make the admissible inadmissible, and the inadmissible admissible." In Al Nassafy's commentary on this same verse, volume 1 page 116, he says: "Abrogation is the alteration and the termination of the legal effect."

Mohamed: ***But the Quran says in Surah 13 (El Ra3d) verse 39, "God erases whatever He wishes . What do you have to say about that?"***

Father: Well, the Quran adds here another meaning to abrogation, which is erasing. And there are so many verses in the Quran that have to do with abrogation and canceling. So God abrogates, meaning "cancels", or he erases, which means He removes completely. So it carries several meanings, as commentators have said.

Mohamed: ***What's the importance of the topic of abrogation regarding the Quran?***

Father: It is a rather serious issue. We can only say what the scholars or jurisprudence came up with. I read many books about it, such as "The Abrogating and the Abrogated Verses in the Quran" by Hebat Allah Salama Ibn Nasr Ibn Aly Al Boghdady, who died in the year 410, after Hegra . Also "Abrogation in the Holy Quran" by Abo Gaafar Al Nahhas. There are several books, not to mention the Islamic websites.

These books explain the importance of abrogation. They claim that the Quran cannot be understood unless one already understands abrogation. So, for example, if someone finds a certain legal judgment in the Quran, but this legal judgment has been cancelled or abrogated, he will end up interpreting the old abrogated judgment, not knowing that it has been cancelled, and this will lead to confusion. And such an incident actually took place with Aly Ibn Aby Taleb. It is told about Aly Ibn Aby Taleb that he went to a mosque in Koofa and found a man encircled by many people. His name was Abd El Rahman Ibn Dab, he was a friend of Moosa Al Ashaary, so he was a well known person. He heard the guy giving legal opinions, or "Fatwas". He listened to him and didn't like what he had to say. He asked him, " Did you know about abrogation? "The man answered, " No". So Aly said to him, " you perish, and you cause others to perish." He took hold of his ear and squeezed it hard, took him outside the mosque and told him, " I don't want to see you here anymore." Why? Because he was leading people to perish. So we conclude from this story that we have to know about abrogation in order to know which the valid judgments are.

Mohamed: *This piece of information you mentioned is written in the book called "Al Nasekh we al Mansookh" by Hebat Allah Al Boghdady page 12. And the viewers could check it out for themselves.*

Father: Thank you.

Mohamed: Another question, where does the idea of abrogation in the Quran come from?

Father: This is a very serious and important question, because in the Quran there are several verses that openly say that abrogation took place in some verses. And the most famous verse in this respect is the one in Surah 2 (El Baqara) verse 106, where it says: "We do not cancel any verse or let it be forgotten; instead we bring something better than it or else something

similar." There is another verse as well, in Surah 16 (El Nahl) verse 101, where it says "Whenever we replace a verse by another verse and God is aware of what he sends down. They say you are merely an imposter. Indeed most of them do not know anything." So there is replacement. There is the verse from Surah 13 (El Raad) which you just said. Verse 39, "God erases and consolidates whatever He wishes, He retains the mother of the book." and in 22, verse 52 it says that "God will cancel out whatever Satan tampers with." There are certainly other verses, but these are the most prominent ones that speak about the abrogating and the abrogated verses in the Quran.

Mohamed: *I personally am confronted with a question that occurs to a Muslim's mind, that God, as it says in Surah (El Nahl) verse 101; is aware of what He sends down, and we know that God is all-powerful. What do you say about this comment?*

Father: Very good. God is all-powerful. He does whatever He wishes yet God respects the intellect of the man He created. He will not do anything that goes contrary to the intellect. He may do something that goes beyond the intellect, but He can never go against the intellect, and at the same time, He makes it available to me to understand what it means, the wisdom behind this. So as a human being, God endowed me with the intellect, and I have to use it to understand. I am supposed to study. So it is true, God is free to do whatever He wishes, but that must not be in conflict with the intellect and reason. It must be something that we can comprehend and understand and know the reasons behind.

Mohamed: Yes. *Another question here. What is meant by "to let it be forgotten"?*

Father: It means God made the Messenger forget it. "We do not cancel any verse or let it be forgotten". There are several traditions about Mohamed the prophet of Islam, to the effect that

he forgot many verses. In the Saheeh of Al Bokhary, tradition number 5092, quoting several other people that go back to Aisha, she said: "The messenger of God, may God's prayers be upon him, heard a man reciting a Surah by night. He said, "May God show mercy to him, he has reminded me of such and such a thing, a verse I was made to forget from such and such a Surah, "was made to forget it". The passive voice here refers to God, in the Saheeh by Muslim.

Mohamd: ***But this is only natural. The prophet of Islam himself said, I am only a mere human just as you are.***

Father: Right. May I make a remark here?

Mohamed: ***Yes.***

Father: I want to emphasize that Mohamed did not merely forget, but rather was made to forget it, as the Quran puts it. It is a transitive verb in Arabic. God made him forget it, Mohamed did not forget it. No, he was made to forget it. I want to make something clear here and it is, as a matter of fact, the crux of the question.

Mohamed: ***Yes that's right. The question poses itself then, would God make someone forget the verses that He had revealed to him?***

Father: Not just a man, a prophet. How come then that God says: We have sent down the reminder and we are safeguarding it?

Mr. Mohamed , these are many many topics that are put forward, and we would like our beloved Muslim scholars, those who are experts in this field to appear on the screen, on any satellite channel and try to answer those gaps in the minds of the people. People want to know why did God give him these verses, if He wanted to make him forget them afterwards? As a reader, I have to ask this question, not protesting, or objecting or contesting,

but God gave me this mind and this mind makes me inquire, and Islamic books as you can see are quite spread on the market, and we study them in order to understand, but I, my hope is that some of the scholars of Al Azhar would be interested, and appear on the screen and tell us, " Well folks, this is what is right and this is what is wrong, just to explain what the whole thing is about. For example, in tradition number 1874 in the Saheeh of Muslim, quoting Aesha as well, she says," The prophet was listening to the recitation of a man in the mosque. He said 'May God show mercy to him, he reminded me of a verse which I was made to forget.'" This has been also mentioned by Ibn Katheer in his commentary volume 1 page 104. He says quoting Ibn Gareer, that the prophet recited a part of the Quran, and then he was made to forget it.

Mohamed: : He was made to forget it, not he forgot it.

Father: Ibn Abbas made this mistake, and said forgot instead of made to forget. He said in one instance "Revelation would be sent down to the prophet by night and he would forget it by day". But this is a mistake here. He did not forget it, he was made to forget it, that is, by God, and here is the seriousness of the question. If God makes him forget it, why had He given it to him to start with? An intelligent and thinking person must ask this question, and he has all the right to be answered.

Do you know, Mr. Mohamed what the problem is? It is simply that people have taken things for granted, thus said God and thus said the prophet. Well, but why did God give us an intellect? To think of course. So the issue is simply to think and to inquire, so that the honorable Muslim scholars would answer in such a way, that would satisfy the minds of their own co-religionists.

Mohamed: Now we come to the question of, why would God give or reveal this verse to start with, and then afterwards cause it to be forgotten? And if the prophet can forget so what about the Quran?

Father: That's right if the prophet himself could forget, what about those who memorized the Quran, before it was written down? Maybe God would have caused them to forget also

Mohamed: *Another question related to it, what is meant by the Quranic expression: 'Better than it'?*

Father: This is a truly good question. This is one of the questions that pose themselves on one's mind.

Let me ask a question without contesting the validity or anything.

If there is a verse that is better than another verse would that mean that in God's words there are good words and better words?

Mohamad: I think you are pointing to Surah 2 (El Baqara) verse 106, where it says, "We do not cancel any verse nor let it be forgotten, instead We bring something better than it, or else something similar." And namely, that God is able to reveal a better verse than the one preceding it.

Father: Does God have good words and better ones? If He has good words and better ones, then He has – God forbid, bad words.

Mohamed: *Got your point, so He should have, from the start, revealed the best. In this case, is there a comparison in God's revelation?*

Father: Yes, of course if we take it this way, it will mean that there is comparison. If we use 'better' which denotes comparison, then we are talking about comparison.

There is a more serious issue, that not just better than it, but similar to it. Why wouldn't God remind him of the exact same verse, not something similar to it? All these are questions, that just arise in people's minds. What's the advantage of revealing a similar verse, why wouldn't God reveal the exact verse?

Mohamed: Then what are the exact words that were written in the preserved tablet?

Well, now the issue gets even messier. What about the preserved tablet? What about him being caused to forget? What about God giving better verses? Well, what about the words in the preserved tablet? Are they the good ones, or the better ones or the verses that were completely erased, or made to be forgotten? It is a real mess.

Mohamed: Right. Do Muslims believe that there is abrogation within the Quran?

Father: To be honest, this is an important question and out of my readings I'll tell you the opinions of the Muslim scholars of jurisprudence. For example, Ibn Katheer in his commentary, volume 1, page 105. He says "All Muslims agree that it is permissible to abrogate God's judgments. And all of them held, that it took place." So, it happened.

Al Imam Al Nassafy, as well, in his commentary in volume 1, page 116, says, "It is permissible to abrogate parts of the Quran and the Sunna (the traditions of Mohamed), whether by agreement, or disagreement, such as by addition to the text, and causing to forget, which means the memory of the verse would vanish from the minds. And also in the Islamic Encyclopedia, volume 3, page 9900, it says: 'Abrogation from God is a consciously applied process, planned in advance and intended to be applied to the content of revelation.'" In Al Azhar's website, which is a very important reference, professor doctor Abd El Fattah Mahmoud Edrees wrote an article on abrogation, in which he says: "The majority of experts of jurisprudence and fundamentals agreed to the fact that abrogation is permissible logically, and legally." Also in the book "Al Nasekh and Al Mansookh in the Quran" by Abo Gaafar Al Nahaas page 6, there is a very nice part which I'd like to refer to: "Abrogation in the holy Quran is an accomplished fact, called for by the necessity of legislation." Hence we come to realize that abrogation did

take place in the Quran. In the same book, on page 7, the author says, in its introduction: "We must point to the matter of denial of abrogation in the holy Quran, which is a very old issue put forward by Abu Muslim Al Asfahany."

Mohamed: *We thank you very much Father. Our time is over. There are many questions that arise. Dear viewers; Do you believe in abrogation? Do you believe that God replaces a verse by another one, that God would erase a verse and follow it up with another one? Does God change His mind? We welcome all of your questions. And if you would like to receive a free copy of the Bible, you will see on the screen our addresses. You can contact us through the internet, or through the mail. We welcome all of your questions, and thank you very much. See you again in the next episode.*

Father: Thank you.