138742 - Can hadeeth abrogate or make specific the general meaning of verses of the Holy Qur’an?

the question

Does the hadeeth have the authority to abrogate or make specific the general meaning of a Qur’anic text?

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Firstly:

The Qur’an and Sunnah are of the same status with regard to being sources of Islamic legislation. Allah, may He be glorified and exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning):

“Nor does he [the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him)] speak of (his own) desire. It is only an Inspiration that is inspired”

[an-Najm 53:3-4].

Al-Khateeb al-Baghdadi (may Allah have mercy on him) wrote a chapter in his valuable book al-Kifaayah fi ‘Ilm ar-Riwaayah (p. 23) entitled “Chapter on what is narrated about the ruling of the Book of Allah, may He be exalted, being equal to the ruling of the Sunnah of the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) with regard to acts being obligatory and binding.” End quote.

Under this heading he narrated the hadeeth of al-Miqdaam ibn Ma‘di Yakrib (may Allah be pleased with him), according to which the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “Verily I have been given the Qur’an and something like it with it. Soon a man who has eaten his fill, resting on his couch, will say : ‘You must follow this Qur’an; whatever you find in it as permissible, then regard it as permissible, and whatever you find in it as prohibited, then regard it

as prohibited. Verily, whatever the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) has prohibited is like that which Allah has prohibited."

It was narrated by at-Tirmidhi (2664) who said: It is hasan ghareeb with this isnaad. It was classed as hasan by al-Albaani in as-Silsilah as-Saheehah (2870)

The Sunnah explains in detail that which is mentioned in brief in the Book of Allah, it makes specific or restricts that which it mentions in general terms, and it explains what abrogates and what is abrogated. The imam of the Taabi'een, Makhool (may Allah have mercy on him) said: The Qur'an needs the Sunnah more than the Sunnah needs the Qur'an.

End quote from al-Kifaayah (p. 30)

Secondly:

With regard to the Sunnah limiting the general meaning of Qur'anic texts, the majority of scholars of usool are of the view that it is possible.

Ibn an-Najjaar al-Fatoohi (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

Some verses of the Qur'an that are general in meaning could be made specific or limited by others or by the Sunnah in general, whether the Sunnah is narrated in mutawaatir or aahaad reports.

An example of the general meaning of a Qur'anic text being made specific by the Sunnah – even if it is narrated in aahaad reports, according to Ahmad, Maalik and ash-Shaafa'i (may Allah have mercy on them) – is the verse in which Allah, may He be glorified and exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning): "All others are lawful" [an-Nisa' 4:24]. This is made specific by the words of the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him), in which a particular exception is made: "One should not be married to a woman and her paternal aunt, or her maternal aunt, as the same time." Agreed upon. A similar example is when an exception is made to the verse on stealing with regard to anything of a value less than the minimum threshold [above which the thief's hand is to be cut off], who are to be banished, and so on.

Ibn Muflih said: According to the Hanafis, if the verse which is general in meaning was made specific [or an exception was made] on the basis of proof on which all are agreed, then that is acceptable, otherwise it is not. Some scholars said that they did not reach a conclusion on this issue, and others said that it is possible but it never happened.

End quote. Sharh al-Kawkab al-Muneer (3/359-363)

Ash-Shawkaani (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

They differed as to whether it is possible for a text of the Qur'an to be made specific[or an exception to be made] on the basis of aahaad reports.

The majority are of the view that it is possible in all cases.

Some of the Hanbalis are of the view that it is not possible at all. Al-Ghazaali mentioned this from the Mu'tazilah in al-Mankhool, and Ibn Burhaan narrated it from some of the scholars of kalaam and the fuqaha'. Abu'l-Husayn ibn al-Qattaan narrated it from a number of the scholars of Iraq.

Al-Karkhi was of the view that it is possible if that which is mentioned in general terms was made specific beforehand with separate evidence, whether the evidence is definitively sound or most likely to be sound.

Al-Qaadi Abu Bakr did not give a view on this issue.

In al-Mahsool the view of the majority is supported by the fact that the general meaning of a text and of an aahaad report may be contradictory evidence, but the aahaad report is more specific than the general meaning, so it should be given precedence over the text that is general in meaning.

Ibn as-Sam'aani quoted as evidence for this possibility the fact that the Sahaabah were unanimously agreed on this matter, hence they made the text "Allah commands you as regards your children's (inheritance)" [an-Nisa' 4:11] specific by noting the exemption in the hadeeth in which the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: "We Prophets are not to be

inherited from.” They also made inheritance something specifically and exclusively between Muslims, based on the words of the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him): “The disbeliever does not inherit from a Muslim.” And they made the verse “then kill the Mushrikoon” [at-Tawbah 9:5] specific on the basis of the report of ‘Abd ar-Rahmaan ibn ‘Awf concerning the Magians [who were exempted]; and so on. What clearly indicates that it is permissible to make general texts specific (or make exemptions from them) is what is mentioned in the Qur’an of Allah’s command to follow His Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) in absolute terms, without any limits or exceptions. So if there is a report from him, then it is obligatory to follow it. If it is apparently contradicted by the general meaning of a Qur’anic text, then we must try to reconcile between them by understanding the meaning of the general texts in light of the specific text, for the meaning of what is mentioned in general terms could be understood on the basis of conjecture that is not definitive. Therefore there is nothing wrong with understanding it in the light of a aahaad report that speaks in a more specific manner. End quote.

Irshaad al-Fuhool (p. 267-286)

Al-‘Allaamah al-Ameen ash-Shinqeeti (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

In fact it is possible to understand a mutawaatir report in light of an aahaad report, because making something specific is an explanation of a text that speaks of the matter in general terms. We have stated above that a mutawaatir text, whether it is Qur’an or Sunnah, may be explained by an aahaad text. End quote.

Makhdirah Usool al-Fiqh (p. 222)

Thirdly:

With regard to the issue of the Sunnah abrogating texts of the Holy Qur’an, the scholars differed concerning this and there are two views:

1.It is not possible for the Sunnah narrated in aahaad reports to abrogate the Holy Qur’an. This is the view of the majority of scholars of usool.

In ar-Risaalah (p. 106-109), ash-Shaafa‘i favoured the view, as did Ahmad (may Allah have mercy on them both), that it is not possible for a mutawaatir text of Sunnah to abrogate a Qur’anic text. This view was also favoured by Ibn Qudaamah and Ibn Taymiyah.

You can read about this issue at length in al-Bahr al-Muheet by az-Zarkashi ash-Shaafa‘i (2/262-272)

2.It is possible for the Sunnah narrated in aahaad reports to abrogate a Qur’anis text. This is the view of some scholars of usool among the Hanafis. This is also the view favoured by as-Subki in Jam‘ al-Jawaami‘ (p. 57) where he said: The Sunnah is for the Qur’an to abrogate another text of Qur’an or Sunnah, and for the Sunnah to abrogate Qur’an. It was said that an aahaad report cannot abrogate a Qur’anic text, but in fact that only occurred in the case of mutawaatir texts. End quote.

The view favoured by al-‘Allaamah Muhammad al-Ameen ash-Shinqeeti (may Allah have mercy on him) is as follows

What appears to us to be correct is that it is possible for saheeh aahaad reports to abrogate mutawaatir texts, if it is proven that (the aahaad report) came after the mutawaatir report, and that there is no way that there can be a contradiction between them, because the mutawaatir report is true and the Sunnah that comes after it only explains something that was not there before it. So there is no contradiction between them at all, because they occurred at different times.

With regard to the verse in which Allah, may He be exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning): “Say (O Muhammad SAW): "I find not in that which has been inspired to me anything forbidden to be eaten by one who wishes to eat it, unless it be Maytatah (a dead animal) or blood poured forth (by slaughtering or the like), or the flesh of swine (pork, etc.) for that surely is impure, or impious (unlawful) meat (of an animal) which is slaughtered as a sacrifice for others than Allah (or has been slaughtered for idols, etc., or on which Allah’s Name has not been mentioned while slaughtering). But whosoever is forced by necessity without wilful disobedience, nor transgressing

due limits, (for him) certainly, your Lord is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful” [al-An‘aam 6:145],

this verse clearly indicates that it is permissible to eat the flesh of tame donkeys, because it implies that only the things mentioned here are prohibited.

But then after that the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) stated on the day of Khaybar, according to the saheeh hadeeth, that the flesh of tame donkeys is not permissible. But there is no contradiction between this saheeh hadeeth and this verse that was revealed two years before it, because the hadeeth is speaking of a new prohibition, and there is nothing in the verse to suggest that no new ruling could be introduced in the future, as is quite clear.

Based on the above, it is possible – in sha Allah – for a mutawaatir text to be abrogated by a saheeh aahaad hadeeth that came later than it, even though the majority of scholars of usool hold a different view. End quote.

Adwa’ al-Bayaan (2/452-451)

And Allah knows best.