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**Anonymous Expressions Regarding the Theological Debates in the Commentary  
of al-Ṭabarī I: Attributes of God**  
*Taberî Tefsirindeki Kelami Tartıřmalarla İlgili Anonim İfadeler I: Allah'ın Sıfatları*

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## Abstract

Muhammad b. Jarir al-Tabari (d. 310/923), in his commentary called *Jami' al-bayān 'an ta'wīl āy al-Qur'ān*, handles the theological debates that emerged until his time. Although he sometimes provides the proper names of the persons and sects to whom theological views belong, he nevertheless mostly does not give the related proper names. Instead of giving proper names, he uses anonymous expressions such as 'some researchers', 'some exegetes', or 'those who believe that the acts of humans are created by themselves, not by God.' Therefore many ideas of the sectarian groups of the first three centuries of Islam remain anonymous in his commentary. In this article, the proper names of persons and sects alluded to by al-Tabari under anonymous expressions will be brought to light within the framework of Islamic literature. Depending on the theological debates he deals with, al-Tabari sometimes transmits traditions related to the views discussed, but sometimes not. We will summarise the views given in the traditions which are quoted by al-Tabari. Therefore, in this study, only the *isnāds* of the traditions referred to by al-Tabari as support for the views discussed will be provided, whereas the texts of the traditions will be left out. In this study we will not present all the anonymous debates, but just those which are related to the essential (al-Şifā al-Dhatiyya) and the anthropomorphic attributes of God.

**Keywords:** Exegesis, al-Tabari, Jami' al-bayān, Islamic Sects, Islamic Theology.

## Öz

Muhammed b. Cerir et-Taberî (ö. 310/923), *Câmi' u'l-beyân 'an te'vili âyi'l-Kur'ân* adlı tefsirinde kendi dönemine kadar ortaya çıkan kelami meseleleri temel olarak ele almıştır. Taberî, ele aldığı kelami tartışmalardaki görüş sahiplerinin özel isimlerini bazen açıkça ifade etse de çoğunlukla ilgili kişi ve fırka adlarının yerine 'bazı araştırmacılar', 'bazı müfessirler', 'fiillerin Allah tarafından değil de kullar tarafından yaratıldığını iddia edenler' gibi anonim ibareler kullanır. Dolayısıyla ilk üç asır İslam fırkalarının görüşleri ve aidiyeti Taberî tefsirinde anonim ifadeler altında yer almaktadır. Bundan dolayı bu makalede Taberî'nin anonim ifadelerle göndermede bulunduğu kişi ve fırkaların kimler olduğu temel olarak İslami kaynaklar çerçevesinde gün yüzüne çıkartılmaya çalışılacaktır. Taberî, ele aldığı kelami tartışmalara bağlı olarak ilgili tartışmalarda taraf olan kişi veya grubun görüşünü desteklemek üzere bazen rivayet aktarırken, bazen de ilgili tartışmalarda herhangi bir rivayet aktarmaz. Biz burada Taberî tefsirindeki rivayetlerde yer alan görüşleri özet olarak aktaracağımızdan, onun kelami tartışmalarda ilgili görüşleri desteklemek üzere aktardığı rivayetlerin sadece isnadlarını vereceğiz, rivayet metinlerini ise vermeyeceğiz. Zira Taberî'nin ilgili kelami tartışmalarda aktardığı tüm rivayet metinlerini vermek bir makalenin hacmini çokça aşacak boyuttadır. Bu makalede Taberî tefsirinde yer alan tüm anonim kelami tartışmaları değil, sadece Allah'ın zâtî ve haberî sıfatlarıyla ilgili tüm anonim tartışmaları özet olarak aktarmaya çalışacağız. Diğer ihtilafli kelami meselelerde yer alan anonim ifadeleri ise başka bir çalışmada ele almayı planlıyoruz.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Tefsir, Taberî, Câmi' u'l-beyân, Fırkalar, Kelam.

## Introduction

Muhammad b. Jarir al-Tabari (d. 310/923) completed his voluminous commentary called *Jami' al-bayān 'an ta'wīl āy al-Qur'ān* in 270/884, in which he used all the interpretation methods of his age.<sup>1</sup> al-Tabari, in his commentary, briefly handled the theological debates that took place before 270/884. When we examine his commentary, we see that it includes the theological views of many different sects, especially the theological debates which took place between the groups of Ahl al-Sunna and al-Mu'tazila. al-Tabari criticises them within the framework of his own theological viewpoint.

Although al-Tabari's theological thoughts are similar to those of the sects of Ahl al-Sunna, nevertheless he does not follow any sectarian group's opinions extensively. Therefore,

<sup>1</sup> Abū 'Abd Allāh Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī, *Mu'jamu al-udabā': irshād al-arīb ilā ma'rifa al-adīb*, ed. Iḥsān 'Abbās (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islām, 1993), 6/2441, 2452.

although he resembles al-Ash‘arī (d. 324/935) in most of his theological thoughts, he sometimes defends the views of the other Sunni groups, and occasionally differs from all the sects of Ahl al-Sunna.<sup>2</sup>

However, we will not handle al-Ṭabarī’s theological views in this article.<sup>3</sup> On the contrary, our aim here is to determine who were the persons and sects involved in the theological discussions that al-Ṭabarī quoted with anonymous expressions in his commentary, that is, without providing the proper names of persons or sects. He, while handling the theological debates, uses anonymous expressions such as ‘exegetes argued (ikhtalafa ahl al-ta’wīl)’, ‘ulema and exegetes argued (ikhtalafa ahl al-‘ilm wa ahl al-ta’wīl)’, ‘theologians disputed (ikhtalafa ahl al-jadal)’, ‘researchers / scholars argued (ikhtalafa ahl al-baḥṭh)’, or ‘it is disputed (ukhtulifa).’

Therefore the main aim of this article is to make an attempt to reveal who is meant by these anonymous expressions, and similar ones such as ‘some exegetes’, ‘some researchers’, ‘some Basran Arabic experts’, ‘those who believe that acts are created by servants’, or ‘those who deny the torment in the grave.’ Consequently, on one hand the results of this article will contribute to reveal some of the sources of al-Ṭabarī that he used for his commentary, and on the other hand the article will come up with the proper names of the individuals and sectarian groups which al-Ṭabarī presented anonymously.

In this study, we will try to sum up all the anonymous theological views regarding the debates about the attributes of God that we have identified in the entire commentary of al-Ṭabarī. The identification of individuals and sects that are mentioned anonymously in al-Ṭabarī’s commentary related to the theological issues will be, especially, within the framework of the sources which deal directly with the theological debates of the Islamic sects such as al-Ash‘arī’s *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn*, and the other resources of different Islamic sciences.

al-Ṭabarī sometimes refers to traditions related to some of the theological discussions that he handles anonymously in his commentary, but at other times, he does not quote any traditions regarding most of the theological debates. As we will see below clearly, al-Ṭabarī simply quotes different views on the issue under discussion, then makes his own assessment, and ends the topic in this way. Nevertheless, for many theological debates that he handles, he also refers to traditions which each party of the related view uses as evidence. In this study, it will suffice to provide only the *isnāds* (chains of transmitters) of the traditions quoted by al-Ṭabarī, because the traditions are usually used just as support by each sect / party in order to search for a strong authority to strengthen the opinion defended. In addition, we do not feel the need to provide the texts of the traditions, since we will relate all the different views that are put forward in the discussions. Moreover, it would exceed the volume of an article to quote the texts of all the traditions whose *isnāds* are provided here. Since they denote the sources which al-Ṭabarī used for his commentary, the *isnāds* are important regarding the article’s topic.

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<sup>2</sup> Naif Yaşar, *İlk Üç Asır Kelam Tartışmaları ve Taberî* (Ankara: Ankara Okulu Yayınları, 2016), 316-319, 322-326.

<sup>3</sup> See Yaşar, *İlk Üç Asır Kelam Tartışmaları ve Taberî*.

As far as we can see, al-Ṭabarī explicitly mentions only the names of *al-Qadariyya*<sup>4</sup> / *Ahl al-Qadar*<sup>5</sup> and *al-Jahmiyya* in his commentary.<sup>6</sup> He does not use the name *al-Mu'tazila* (that is, *al-Qadariyya* / *Ahl al-Qadar*) directly, but rather, it exists only in a tradition he quotes.<sup>7</sup> Although not as a proper name of a sect, al-Ṭabarī usually uses the following phrases related to the theological debates: *Ahl al-Ḥaqq*,<sup>8</sup> *Ahl al-Jadal*,<sup>9</sup> *Ahl al-Baḥth*,<sup>10</sup> *Ahl al-Ithbāt*,<sup>11</sup> *Ahl al-Islām*,<sup>12</sup> *Ahl al-Tafwīd*.<sup>13</sup>

Now, within the framework of the concepts / titles used in the theological works, we will examine the theological debates regarding attributes of God that al-Ṭabarī referred to anonymously:

## 1. Essential Attributes of God (al-Şifā al-Dhatiyya)

### 1.1. al-'Alī

al-Ṭabarī gives two anonymous views related to the theological debates on God's attribute *al-'Alī* (Truly exalted, al-Baqara 2/255),<sup>14</sup> and does not make any comment regarding the issue:

1. According to some scholars / researchers (ahl al-baḥth), God stated in this expression that there is no one like him, and that he is higher than being similar to anyone / anything. They rejected the claim that this sublimity is spatial, because according to them, it is not possible for any place to be unoccupied by God. Therefore, it makes no sense to describe him with spatial sublimity, because in this case, it would be to describe him as being in one place and not in another place.

2. According to others, the place of God is higher than the place of creatures in the sense that he is higher than creatures, because he is above all his creatures and they are below him. As a matter of fact, God is higher than them, since he describes himself as being on the Throne.<sup>15</sup>

The first view which al-Ṭabarī gives here is supported by most of the Islamic sects, except for al-Mujassima and Ashāb al-Ḥadīth. The second view is not entirely clear. It implies anthropomorphism on the one hand, but on the other hand it resembles the views of Ashāb al-Ḥadīth. For, although Ashāb al-Ḥadīth reject anthropomorphism, but still handle the expressions of the scriptures with extreme literalism.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān 'an ta'wīli āy al-Qur'ān*, ed. Khalīl al-Mais (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 2005), 1/115 (two times); 3/1750; 5/3379, 3683, 3684 (in tradition); 12/7531 (in tradition).

<sup>5</sup> al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān*, 1/97, 100; 2/1345; 8/5063; 11/6966; 12/7531 (twice, one in tradition).

<sup>6</sup> al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān*, 1/158.

<sup>7</sup> al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān*, 13/7932.

<sup>8</sup> al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān*, 2/1154.

<sup>9</sup> al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān*, 4/3131.

<sup>10</sup> al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān*, 3/1537-1538.

<sup>11</sup> al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān*, 8/5063.

<sup>12</sup> al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān*, 1/97.

<sup>13</sup> al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān*, 5/3379.

<sup>14</sup> Muhammad Asad, *The Message of the Qur'ān* (İstanbul: İşaret Yayınları, 2006), 57.

<sup>15</sup> al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān*, 3/1537-1538.

<sup>16</sup> See Ibn Abī Ya'lā, *Ṭabaqāt al-Ḥanābila*, ed. 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Sulaimān al-'Uthaimīn (Riyadh: al-Amāna al-'Āmma li al-İhtifāl, 1999), 1/60-62.

## 1.2. al-Ḥayy

al-Ṭabarī gives three anonymous views related to the theological debates on the attribute *al-Ḥayy* (the Ever-Living, al-Baqara 2/255),<sup>17</sup> and does not make any comment regarding the issue:

1. According to some scholars, God calls himself *al-Ḥayy* in this verse, because he is the one who manages everything in the universe. Therefore, he is *al-Ḥayy* in the sense of managing things, or else he is not *al-Ḥayy* in the sense of having ‘a life.’

2. According to some others, God is *al-Ḥayy* in the sense of having ‘a life as an attribute of him.’

3. According to another group of researchers, this is a name with which God calls himself. So, we too, obeying the commandment of God, profess this name.<sup>18</sup>

The first view belongs to the Mu‘tazilis, the Khārijītes, some of the Murjiites and the Zaydites.<sup>19</sup> The second view belongs to the Sunni sects. al-Ṭabarī, too, interprets the name *al-Ḥayy* within this sense.<sup>20</sup> The third view seems to belong to some Mu‘tazilīs such as ‘Abbād b. Sulaimān (d. 250/864).<sup>21</sup>

## 1.3. al-‘Azīm

al-Ṭabarī gives three anonymous views related to the theological debates on the attribute *al-‘Azīm* (Tremendous, al-Baqara 2/255),<sup>22</sup> and does not make any comment or preference regarding the issue:

1. According to some scholars, the attribute *al-‘Azīm* here means ‘the glorification of God,’ because, the creatures exalt him and fear him. Another possibility is that God is *al-‘Azīm* in the sense of ‘occupying a place in space, and weight.’ However, it is clear that this second view is false. Therefore, the correctness of the first statement is self-evident.

2. According to some others, God has a ‘glory,’ which is an attribute of him. However, we do not discuss how or what the circumstance of the attribute ‘glory’ is. On the contrary, we profess this attribute and reject the resemblance of this ‘glory’ to the known greatness of the servants / creatures, because this assumption means that he resembles the creatures. However, God is not like the creatures. This group reject the first view.

3. According to others, God describes himself as *al-‘Azīm* here. Therefore, all creatures other than him are smaller than him in the sense of ‘being small when compared to his glory / majesty.’<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Asad, *The Message of the Qur‘ān*, 57.

<sup>18</sup> al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-bayān*, 3/1528.

<sup>19</sup> See Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī b. Ismā‘īl al-Ash‘arī, *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn wa ikhtilāf al-muṣallīn*, ed. Na‘īm Zarzūr (Beirut: Maktaba al-‘Aṣriyya, 2009), 1/135-141.

<sup>20</sup> al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-bayān*, 3/1528; Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī b. Ismā‘īl al-Ash‘arī, *Risāla ilā Ahl al-Thaghr*, ed. ‘Abd Allāh Shākir Muḥammad al-Junaidī (Medina: Maktaba al-‘Ulūm wa al-Ḥikam, 2002), 213-218.

<sup>21</sup> al-Ash‘arī, *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn*, 1/136.

<sup>22</sup> Asad, *The Message of the Qur‘ān*, 57.

<sup>23</sup> al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-bayān*, 3/1538.

The first and second opinions that al-Ṭabarī gives anonymously here belong to Ahl al-Sunna, especially to Ashāb al-Ḥadīth. However, since the third view implies anthropomorphism, it is not clear exactly which sect is meant here, if not al-Mujassima.

## 2. Anthropomorphic Attributes of God

### 2.1. Coming and Going (Majī' - Ityān - Nuzūl and Dhahāb)

al-Ṭabarī gives four anonymous views related to the theological debates on the anthropomorphic expression *hal yanẓurūna illā an ya'tiyahum Allāhu fī dhulalin min al-ghamāmi* (Are these people waiting, perchance, for God to reveal Himself unto them in the shadows of the clouds? al-Baqara 2/210),<sup>24</sup> and does not make any comment regarding these debates:

1. God describes himself as coming (majī' / ityān), descending (nuzūl) and so on, and the meaning intended here is the natural meaning of these attributes, because it is not possible to make any comment on the names and attributes of God without any information obtained from God or a prophet.

2. What we should understand from the 'coming of God' here is similar to what we should understand from someone's transferring from one place to another.

3. What is understood from this phrase is that 'what is coming here is the commandment of God.' In the same sense, it is said, 'We are afraid that the Umayyads will come to us.' However, what is meant here is 'the judgement of the Umayyads.'

4. What is meant by this phrase is 'God's reward, reckoning, and punishment will come to us.' Just as it is said, 'The governor punished the thief,' but what is meant here is that this action was not carried out by the governor himself, but by his assistants.<sup>25</sup>

The first view belongs to Ashāb al-Ḥadīth as well as to the other Sunni sects.<sup>26</sup> The third and fourth views belong to the Mu'tazilis,<sup>27</sup> and moreover, the third view is supported by al-Akhfash al-Awsaṭ (d. 215/831)<sup>28</sup> himself as the interpretation of the related verse.<sup>29</sup> The second view actually resembles the view of Ashāb al-Ḥadīth, because they profess the attributes of God which are in the scriptures and avoid any comments regarding them, especially anthropomorphic attributes.<sup>30</sup> However, it is possible that the second view belongs to the Mujassimites (anthropotheists, who claim anthropomorphism about God).<sup>31</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Asad, *The Message of the Qur'an*, 45.

<sup>25</sup> al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān*, 2/1142.

<sup>26</sup> al-Ash'arī, *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn*, 1/168.

<sup>27</sup> Abū al-Ḥasan Sa'īd b. Mas'ada al-Akhfash al-Awsaṭ, *Ma'ānī al-Qur'an*, ed. 'Abd al-Amīr Muḥammad Amīn al-Ward (Beirut: Ālam al-Kutub, 1985), 1/365; 2/473, 706; al-Ash'arī, *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn*, 1/130, 173-174; 2/383-384.

<sup>28</sup> He is a Mu'tazilī scholar.

<sup>29</sup> al-Akhfash, *Ma'ānī al-Qur'an*, 1/365.

<sup>30</sup> al-Ash'arī, *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn*, 1/168.

<sup>31</sup> See Abū Ḥusain 'Abd al-Raḥīm Muḥammad b. 'Uthmān al-Khayyāt, *al-Intiṣār wa al-radd 'alā Ibn al-Rāwandī al-mulḥid*, ed. Doktor Nībarj (Beirut: Maktaba al-Dār al-'Arabiyya, 1993), 5-6, 146; Abū Ja'fer al-Ṭahāwī, *al-'Aqīda al-Ṭahāwiyya* (Beirut: Dār al-Bayāriq, 2001), 13; al-Ash'arī, *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn*, 1/25-27, 44-46, 93, 128, 165, 168-170, 173.

al-Ṭabarī, regarding the interpretation of the expression *fa'dhhab anta wa rabbuka fa qātilā innā hāhunā qā'idūna* ('Go forth, then, thou and thy Sustainer, and fight, both of you! We, behold, shall remain here!'), al-Mā'ida 5/24),<sup>32</sup> gives the following anonymous view:

Some ulema point out that "This phrase does not mean that both of you, that is, you and your Lord with you, go and fight. On the contrary, it means 'Go, O Musa, and may your Lord help you,' because, something like 'going' is not appropriate for God." However, this view is not very consistent, because it is not expressed by a group of believers, but it is a statement that opposes God, slanders him, and is in harmony with those people's blasphemy and perversion. Therefore, there is no point in trying to interpret this phrase.<sup>33</sup>

The opinion that al-Ṭabarī gives above anonymously belongs to Abū 'Ubaida (d. 210/825)<sup>34</sup> who is a Kharijite, but in terms of basic sense, this is the view that al-Mu'tazila also defends regarding this issue.<sup>35</sup>

## 2.2. Mocking and Deceiving (Istihzā' - Makr - Khud'a - Sukhriyya)

al-Ṭabarī gives five anonymous views regarding the theological debates on the anthropomorphic expression *Allāhu yastahzi'u bihim wa yamudduhum fī tughyānihim ya'mahūna* (God will requite them for their mockery, and will leave them for a while in their overweening arrogance, blindly stumbling to and fro, al-Baqara 2/15):<sup>36</sup>

1. What is meant by God's *mocking, deceiving, plotting and making fun of hypocrites* is to punish those people on the Day of Judgement, as it is stated within some verses such as al-Ḥadīd 57/13-14; Āl 'Imrān 3/178.

2. The meaning of God's *mocking, deceiving, plotting and making fun of hypocrites* is to condemn / blame / destroy them for their denial and rebellion, or to give them a respite and to suddenly capture and destroy them when they feel themselves in the safest condition, or to scold them.

3. The verses like these are replies to what these people have said. God *makes fun of* them as a reply to the way they have spoken, for otherwise, God does not *mock people or plot against them*. For example, when a person wins over someone who is trying to deceive him, he says, 'Actually, I deceived you.' In fact, he has not deceived him, but nevertheless, he uses such an expression because the outcome is in his favour.

4. As it is put forward in the verses like *wa jazā'u sayyi'atin sayyi'atun mithluhā* (But [remember that an attempt at] requiting evil may, too, become an evil, al-Shūrā 42/40),<sup>37</sup> and while the first evil stated in the subject verse is a rebellion against God, the second is a just punishment against this rebellion. Although the meanings of the two expressions are different

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<sup>32</sup> Asad, *The Message of the Qur'an*, 146.

<sup>33</sup> al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān*, 4/2983.

<sup>34</sup> Abū 'Ubaida Ma'mer b. al-Muthannā, *Majāz al-Qur'an*, ed. Aḥmad Farīd al-Miziyadī (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 2006), 70.

<sup>35</sup> See al-Ash'arī, *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn*, 1/130.

<sup>36</sup> Asad, *The Message of the Qur'an*, 5.

<sup>37</sup> Asad, *The Message of the Qur'an*, 746.

from one another, nevertheless they are both expressed within the same word (*sayyi'ah*). Likewise, these kinds of expressions show the similarity in speech. Expressions like these mean that: God informs us that he will punish their mockery and deceit.

5. The meaning of “God *makes fun of hypocrites*” is that he shows them in this world a situation which is opposite to their end in the Hereafter.<sup>38</sup>

The first and fifth views belong to the Sunni ulema such as Muqātil b. Sulaimān (d. 150/767) and al-Ṭabarī. al-Ṭabarī argues here anonymously with those who interpret anthropomorphic attributes of God (in accordance with logic and language data).<sup>39</sup> The second, third, and fourth views belong to the Mu'tazilī ulema such as al-Farrā' (d. 207/823)<sup>40</sup> and al-Akhfash al-Awsat,<sup>41</sup> and to the Khārijite ulema such as Abū 'Ubaida.<sup>42</sup>

al-Ṭabarī, regarding the interpretation of the expression *yukhādi'ūna Allāha* (They would deceive God, al-Baqara 2/9),<sup>43</sup> cites the opinion of Abū 'Ubaida within an anonymous statement ‘some persons famous for being grammarians of the Arabic language.’ According to Abū 'Ubaida, although this verb is in reciprocal form *yukhādi'ūna*, it actually has the meaning of *yakhda'ūna*. Therefore, this statement means that ‘hypocrites express what is not in their hearts.’<sup>44</sup>

### 2.3. Anger / Wrath (Ghaḍab)

al-Ṭabarī, regarding the word *al-maghḍūbi* (condemned, al-Fātiḥa 1/7),<sup>45</sup> expresses the disagreement among ulema about the interpretation of God's attribute *ghaḍab* and gives three anonymous opinions, but does not make any comments related to these opinions:

1. God's *ghaḍāb* means, ‘punishing the individual in this world or in the Hereafter.’ God has expressed this reality in verses such as al-Mā'ida 5/60 and al-Zukhruf 43/55.

2. God's *ghaḍāb* against some individuals is God's verbal condemnation of them and their actions.

3. God's *ghaḍāb* in this verse is used within the natural meanings of *ghaḍāb* (wrath). However, we accept this meaning just in terms of professing an attribute of God. Actually, his wrath is different from the wrath of humans which disturbs, moves, and torments them psychologically, whereas such conditions do not affect God's essence. Just as knowledge is God's attribute, but it is not similar to the knowledge of humans, and also, might is God's attribute, but it is not similar to the might of humans, which exists at the time of the action and disappears in the absence of the action. Similarly, wrath as an attribute of God is not like wrath as an attribute of humans.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>38</sup> al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān*, 1/175-178.

<sup>39</sup> Muqātil b. Sulaimān, *Tafsīru Muqātil b. Sulaimān*, ed. 'Abd Allāh Maḥmūd Shaḥāta (Beirut: Mu'assasa al-Tārikh al-'Arabī, 2002), 1/89, 91, 278, 416; 3/772-773; al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān*, 1/175-178.

<sup>40</sup> Abū Zakiriyyā Yahyā b. Zayād al-Farrā', *Ma'ānī al-Qur'ān* (Beirut: 'Ālam al-Kutub, 1983), 1/64, 116-117, 218; 3/49, 116.

<sup>41</sup> al-Akhfash, *Ma'ānī al-Qur'ān*, 1/193, 354.

<sup>42</sup> Abū 'Ubaida, *Majāz al-Qur'ān*, 25, 48, 88, 219, 267.

<sup>43</sup> Asad, *The Message of the Qur'ān*, 5.

<sup>44</sup> Abū 'Ubaida, *Majāz al-Qur'ān*, 25; al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān*, 1/159-160.

<sup>45</sup> Asad, *The Message of the Qur'ān*, 2.

<sup>46</sup> al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān*, 1/111.



All three opinions given above anonymously belong to the sects of the Ahl al-Sunna.<sup>47</sup> In particular, the statement ‘it is not like the power (of humans) which exists at the time of the action and disappears in the absence of the action’ is the exact statement of the Ahl al-Sunna about *istiṭā’a* / *strength (of humans)*.<sup>48</sup> Therefore, al-Ṭabarī did not reject any of the mentioned opinions, and his explanations for the attribute *ghaḍāb* in his commentary include all the views quoted above.<sup>49</sup>

## 2.4. Hand and Qabḍatun

### 2.4.1. Hand

al-Ṭabarī gives four anonymous views related to the theological debates about the expression *bal yadāhu mabsūṭatāni* (Nay, but wide are His hands stretched out, al-Mā’ida 5/64),<sup>50</sup> and does not make any preference among the quoted opinions:

1. According to some theologians (ahl al-jadal), what is meant by *hand* in this phrase is ‘two blessings.’ Such usages exist in Arabic.
2. According to some others, what is meant by *hand* in this phrase is ‘might.’
3. According to another group of theologians, what is meant by *hand* in this phrase is ‘dominion / possession.’
4. According to some others, what is meant by *hand* in this phrase is neither ‘two blessings’ nor ‘might’ nor ‘dominion / possession.’ All of these views are wrong. Actually, the *hand* in this phrase is one of the attributes of God, but not an organ. According to this view, God, among all his creatures, states that he created only Adam with both his hands. If this were not so, there would be no need to mention Adam with such a privilege.<sup>51</sup>

The first, second, and third views belong to those who interpret anthropomorphic attributes of God in a figurative way such as the Mu’tazilis, the Jahmites and the Kharijites.<sup>52</sup> Moreover, the first view is supported by some Mu’tazilis such as al-Akhfash al-Awsaṭ<sup>53</sup> and al-Farrā’<sup>54</sup> themselves, and by some Kharijites such as Abū ‘Ubaida himself.<sup>55</sup> Actually, al-Ṭabarī also interprets the *hand* in this verse in coherence with the first view, but surprisingly he inclines towards Sunni ideas when he handles the related theological debates.<sup>56</sup> The fourth view belongs

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<sup>47</sup> See al-Ash’arī, *Risāla ilā Ahl al-Thaḡhr*, 231.

<sup>48</sup> al-Ash’arī, *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn*, 1/173-174, 221-222.

<sup>49</sup> al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’ al-bayān*, 1/107; 4/2961; 9/5834, 5940. See also Yaşar, *İlk Üç Asır Kelam Tartışmaları ve Taberî*, 157-159. For two anonymous views in the interpretation of the verse al-Mā’ida 5/16 related to the theological debates on ‘al-Riḍā’ as an anthropomorphic attribute of God see al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’ al-bayān*, 4/2961.

<sup>50</sup> Asad, *The Message of the Qur’ān*, 157.

<sup>51</sup> al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’ al-bayān*, 4/3131-3132.

<sup>52</sup> al-Ash’arī, *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn*, 1/130, 136-137, 152, 156, 173-174; 2/383-384.

<sup>53</sup> al-Akhfash, *Ma’ānī al-Qur’ān*, 2/473.

<sup>54</sup> al-Farrā’, *Ma’ānī al-Qur’ān*, 1/315.

<sup>55</sup> Abū ‘Ubaida, *Majāz al-Qur’ān*, 74.

<sup>56</sup> al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’ al-bayān*, 4/3129-3132; See also Yaşar, *İlk Üç Asır Kelam Tartışmaları ve Taberî*, 167.

to the ulema of Aşhāb al-Ḥadīth such as Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (d. 241/855), and to the other Sunni sects.<sup>57</sup> al-Ṭabarī also defends the fourth view even if not explicitly.<sup>58</sup>

### 2.4.2. Qabḍatun

al-Ṭabarī interprets the word *qabḍatun* (al-Zumar 39/67) within the meaning ‘the grip / hand of God’ and then, under the anonymous expression ‘some Basran Arabic experts,’ quotes al-Akhfash al-Awsaṭ’s view regarding the commentary of this word. al-Akhfash al-Awsaṭ, who is a scholar of al-Mu‘tazila, interprets the word *qabḍatun* within the meaning ‘to be in one’s power and disposal.’<sup>59</sup>

### 2.5. Istiwā

al-Ṭabarī quotes five anonymous views regarding the theological debates on the concept of *istiwā* (al-Baqara 2/29), and refers to just one tradition related to the fifth view:

1. According to some exegetes, what is meant by *istiwā* here is ‘to return.’
2. According to another group of exegetes, this term explains the act of God, not his movement and transmission.
3. According to some others, in this verse *istiwā* denotes an act related to the heavens which means ‘the heavens are levelled.’
4. According to others, what is meant in this verse is that ‘God’s intention headed towards the heavens.’
5. According to others, *istiwā* means ‘ascension.’ ‘Ascension’ is ‘going up.’ According to some of those who support this view, it is ‘God’ who ‘ascends’ to the sky here and according to others it is ‘smoke’ that ‘ascends.’

\* ‘Ammār b. al-Ḥasan *from* ‘Abd Allāh b. Abī Ja‘far *from* his father *from* al-Rabī‘ b. Anas.<sup>60</sup>

The first view belongs to some of the Mu‘tazilis such as al-Farrā’.<sup>61</sup> al-Ṭabarī, without stating the proper name of al-Farrā’, anonymously argues this view in detail and rejects it.<sup>62</sup> The second view also belongs to some of the Mu‘tazilis such as al-Akhfash al-Awsaṭ.<sup>63</sup> The fifth view belongs to al-Ṭabarī as far as we can follow from his discussion of al-Farrā’’s view related to the subject term.<sup>64</sup> The third and fourth views are not clear enough to determine to whom they belong. However, the fourth view basically resembles the opinions of the Mu‘tazilis.<sup>65</sup>

<sup>57</sup> al-Ash‘arī, *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn*, 1/168-173.

<sup>58</sup> al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-bayān*, 5/3680; Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *al-Tabṣīr fī ma‘ālim al-dīn*, ed. ‘Alī b. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz b. ‘Alī al-Shibl (Riyadh: Dār al-‘Āshima, 1996), 133, 142; See also Yaşar, *İlk Üç Asır Kelam Tartışmaları ve Taberî*, 164, 166.

<sup>59</sup> al-Akhfash, *Ma‘ānī al-Qur‘ān*, 2/674; al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-bayān*, 12/7468-7472.

<sup>60</sup> al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-bayān*, 1/252-254.

<sup>61</sup> al-Farrā’, *Ma‘ānī al-Qur‘ān*, 1/25.

<sup>62</sup> al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-bayān*, 1/252-254.

<sup>63</sup> al-Akhfash, *Ma‘ānī al-Qur‘ān*, 1/218.

<sup>64</sup> al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-bayān*, 1/252-254; See also Yaşar, *İlk Üç Asır Kelam Tartışmaları ve Taberî*, 171-176.

<sup>65</sup> see Jārullāh Abu‘l-Qāsim Maḥmūd b. ‘Umar al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf ‘an Ḥaqā’iqi ghawāḍi al-tanzīl wa ‘uyūn al-‘aqāwīl fī wujūhi al-ta’wīl*, eds. ‘Ādil ‘Aḥmad ‘Abd al-Mawjūd and ‘Alī Muḥammad Mu‘awwid (Riyad: Maktabah al-‘Ubayqān, 1998), 1/250.

## 2.6. A Laudable / Glorious Position (Maqāman Maḥmūdan, al-Isrā' 17/79)

### 2.6.1. First Debate

al-Ṭabarī gives two anonymous views related to the debates on the expression *maqāman maḥmūdan*. The views and related *isnāds* of the traditions that al-Ṭabarī refers to are as follows:

1. According to most exegetes, *maqāman maḥmūdan* means *al-shafā'a* / intercession in the Hereafter. The Prophet will be in this position to save people from the violent situation they encounter on that day.

\* Muḥammad b. Bashshār from 'Abd al-Raḥmān from Sufyān from Abū Ishāq from Ṣilah b. Zufar from Ḥudhaifa.

\* Muḥammad b. al-Muthannā from Muḥammad b. Ja'far from Shu'ba from Abū Ishāq from Ṣilah b. Zufar from Ḥudhaifa.

\* Sulaimān b. 'Amr b. Khālīd al-Raqī from 'Īsā b. Yūnus from Rishdīn b. Kuraib from his father from Ibn 'Abbās.

\* Ibn Bashshār from 'Abd al-Raḥmān from Sufyān from Salama b. Kuhail from Abū al-Za'rā' from 'Abd Allāh.

\* Muḥammad b. Bashshār from Ibn Abī 'Adī from 'Awf from al-Ḥasan.

\* Muḥammad b. 'Amr from Abū 'Āṣim from 'Īsā from Ibn Abī Najīḥ from Mujāhid.

\* al-Ḥārith from al-Ḥasan from Warqā' from Ibn Abī Najīḥ from Mujāhid.

\* al-Qāsim from al-Ḥusain from Ḥajjāj from Ibn Juraij from Mujāhid.

\* al-Qāsim from al-Ḥusain from Abū Mu'āwiya from 'Āṣim al-Aḥwal from Abū 'Uthmān from Sulaimān.

\* Bishr from Yazīd from Sa'īd from Qatāda.

\* Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-A'lā from Muḥammad b. Thawr from Ma'mar from Qatāda.

\* al-Ḥasan b. Yaḥyā from 'Abd al-Razzāq from Ma'mar and al-Thawrī from Abū Ishāq from Ṣilah b. Zufar from Ḥudhaifa.

\* Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-A'lā from Muḥammad b. Thawr from Ma'mar from Abū Ishāq from Ṣilah b. Zufar from Ḥudhaifa.

2. According to some other exegetes, '*maqāman maḥmūdan*' means that God makes the Prophet sit on the Throne next to him.

\* 'Abbād b. Ya'qūb al-Asadī from Ibn Fuḍail from Laith from Mujāhid.

(al-Ṭabarī states that): According to the traditions narrated from the Prophet, his companions and successors, the sound view is the first one. (Regarding the second view, Ṭabarī states that): The second view is also possible both intellectually and traditionally, and there is no tradition which contradicts this view.<sup>66</sup>

<sup>66</sup> al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān*, 9/5561-5565.

The first view given here is the view accepted by many Islamic sects, especially Ahl al-Sunna.<sup>67</sup> The second view belongs to Aşhāb al-Ḥadīth, especially the Hanbalites.<sup>68</sup>

### 2.6.2. Second Debate

al-Ṭabarī tries hard to explain that it is also logical for *maqāman maḥmūdan* to mean that the Prophet will be seated on the Throne. He states that the views of Muslims regarding God and his Throne are divided into three groups. al-Ṭabarī gives three anonymous views related to the issue:

1. According to one group, God created things, but there was no contact between him and the things. He remained in the pre-eternal state of existence. The fact that God does not touch things means that he is absolutely opposite to them. In that case, since God is different from everything he created, it makes no difference for God whether he seats the Prophet on the Throne or on the ground.

2. According to another group, before God created things, there was nothing that touched or opposed him. God created the things and managed them with his power, but he remained as he was in pre-eternity. The things neither touch him nor are opposite to him. Therefore, it makes no difference for God whether he seats the Prophet on his Throne or on the ground.

3. According to another group, before God created things, there was no being with which he was in contact or to which he was opposite. Then he created the things, and a Throne with which he came into contact. God touches anything he wishes and contradicts anything he wills. In their opinion, sitting on the Throne does not mean that God covers the whole Throne. Therefore, it makes no difference for him whether he seats the Prophet on the Throne or seats him on anything else. Likewise, the Prophet's state does not change from worshipping to lordship just by sitting on the Throne.

(al-Ṭabarī continues, stating that): It is clear that the view we narrated from Mujāhid, which states that '*maqāman maḥmūdan* means that God seats the Prophet on the Throne, next to him,' is also logically possible for all sects of Islam.<sup>69</sup>

However, these views are not clear enough to determine to which sectarian groups they belong, and actually they seem to be just an overall brief summary of the thoughts of Islamic sects. Nevertheless, another possibility and more plausible idea is that in fact these views do not belong to the Islamic sects, but on the contrary, they are fabricated by al-Ṭabarī or more probable by the Hanbalites.

### 2.7. Kursī (Throne / Seat)

al-Ṭabarī gives three anonymous views regarding the debates about the expression *kursiyuhu* (al-Baqara 2/255). The views and related *isnāds* of the traditions that al-Ṭabarī refers to are as follows:

1. According to some exegetes, *Kursī* means knowledge.

\* Abū Kuraib and Salama b. Junāda *from* Ibn Idrīs *from* Muṭarrif *from* Ja'far b. Abī al-Mughīra *from* Sa'īd b. Jubair *from* Ibn 'Abbās.

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<sup>67</sup> See Muqātil, *Tafsīru Muqātil*, 2/546.

<sup>68</sup> Yāqūt, *Mu'jamu al-udabā'*, 6/2450-2451; See also Yaşar, *İlk Üç Asır Kelam Tartışmaları ve Taberî*, 178.

<sup>69</sup> al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān*, 9/5565-5566.

\* Ya'qūb b. Ibrāhīm from Hushaim from Muṭarrif from Ja'far b. Abī al-Mughīra from Sa'īd b. Jubair from Ibn 'Abbās.

2. According to some other exegetes, *Kursī* is the place of God's two feet.

\* 'Alī b. Muslim al-Ṭūsī from 'Abd al-Ṣamad b. 'Abd al-Wārith from my father from Muḥammad b. Juḥāda from Salama b. Kuhail from 'Umāra b. 'Umair from Abū Mūsā.

\* Mūsā b. Hārūn from 'Amr from Asbāt from al-Suddī.

\* al-Muthannā from Ishāq from Abū Zuhair from Juwaibir from al-Ḍaḥḥāk.

\* Aḥmad b. Ishāq from Abū Aḥmad b. al-Zubairī from Sufyān from 'Ammār al-Duhnī from Muslim al-Baṭīn.

\* 'Ammār from Ibn Abī Ja'far from his father from al-Rabī'.

\* Yūnus from Ibn Wahb from Ibn Zaid.

3. According to some others, *Kursī* is *Throne* ('Arsh) itself.

\* al-Muthannā from Ishāq from Abū Zuhair from Juwaibir from al-Ḍaḥḥāk.

al-Ṭabarī states that all three views here have a logical sense, but according to him, the traditions that come from the Prophet show that the most plausible view is the second one. According to al-Ṭabarī, the first view is also quite logical.<sup>70</sup> The second opinion belongs to Aṣḥāb al-Ḥadīth, especially to Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal.<sup>71</sup> The third opinion belongs to al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728).<sup>72</sup>

### Discussion and Conclusion

In this article we have handled al-Ṭabarī's method of presenting the theological debates that took place among the Islamic sectarian groups and individuals in the first three centuries of hijra. We have not studied all the theological discussions that al-Ṭabarī has handled, but on the contrary, we have focused just on the expressions regarding the theological debates which he has given under anonymous expressions. As we have seen throughout the article, in many places of his commentary, al-Ṭabarī presents the theological debates of the individuals or sects without mentioning their proper names. He mostly presents anonymously the theological opinions of the sectarian groups such as Ahl al-Sunna, Aṣḥāb al-Ḥadīth, al-Mu'tazila, al-Khārijīyya, al-Jahmiyya, al-Murjīyya and so on. Additionally, he sometimes gives anonymously special opinions of the individuals of the followers of these sects such as al-Farrā' (d. 207/823), Abū 'Ubaida (d. 210/825), al-Akhfash al-Awsaṭ (d. 215/831) and so on. We think that the main groups whose theological views are discussed anonymously by al-Ṭabarī are Ahl al-Sunna and al-Mu'tazila (Qadariyya / Ahl al-Qadar).

As we have pointed out above, al-Ṭabarī does not provide the proper names of persons / individuals or sects in most of the theological discussions that he briefly covers in his commentary. On the contrary, he gives the opinions of individuals and sectarian groups within the framework of anonymous expressions such as 'exegetes argued (ikhtalafa ahl al-ta'wīl)' and

<sup>70</sup> al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān*, 3/1533-1536.

<sup>71</sup> Ibn Abī Ya'lā, *Ṭabaqāt al-Ḥanābila*, 1/60-61.

<sup>72</sup> al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān*, 3/1534; al-Muṭahhar b. Ṭāhir al-Maqdisī, *Kitāb al-bad' wa al-tārīkh* (Būr Sa'īd: Maktaba al-Thaqāfa al-Dīniyya, n.d.), 1/166.

evaluates them in the context of the views he considers as correct. Likewise, while al-Ṭabarī refers to traditions regarding some theological debates, he mentions most of the theological discussions that he handles in his commentary without referring to traditions.

Regarding this attitude of al-Ṭabarī, an important question arises: Why does al-Ṭabarī not mention the proper names of persons / individuals and sects in detail in his commentary called *Jāmi' al-bayān 'an ta'wīl āy al-Qur'ān*? Taking into account some expressions that we have seen in his commentary and additionally considering the general attitude of the exegetes before him regarding the subject matter, we come to the conclusion that the plausible answers to this question may be as follows:

1. This is not a study of theology, but a commentary on the Qur'an. As a result, al-Ṭabarī avoids going into details about the other Islamic sciences. Therefore, in some parts of his commentary, he points out that he will not provide details about fields such as *theology*, *jurisprudence*, and *qira'at*, and consequently directs the reader to his works in related sciences.<sup>73</sup> For this reason, in his commentary, he does not aim to go into detailed discussions about the other fields of Islamic sciences, but on the contrary, he aims to put forward an interpretation of the Qur'an.<sup>74</sup>

2. It was already known by his contemporaries to whom the theological views belonged. Therefore, there was no need to mention the proper names of persons or sects.

3. al-Ṭabarī does not mention the proper names of persons or sects in most places in his commentary in order not to make the readers feel that he is under the influence of sectarian thoughts while interpreting the Qur'an, and that his commentary is a field where sectarian debates are held. Moreover, in many parts of his commentary, although he actually interprets the Qur'an under the influence of the sectarian debates, he, either consciously or unconsciously, gives the impression that he is not affected by the views of any sect and that he is interpreting the Qur'an completely naturally and regardless of the sectarian debates.

4. The exegesis is a field of expertise. Therefore, the commentaries are written for the experts in the field, not for common people. Consequently, because the experts know the information related to the field, there is no need to mention everywhere the proper names of persons and sectarian groups.

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<sup>73</sup> See al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān*, 1/645, 648; 2/799, 1200-1201, 1283, 1342, 1394; 3/1542-1543; 4/2356, 3067; 6/4157; 10/6392.

<sup>74</sup> See al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān*, 1/15.

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**Etik Beyan / Ethical Statement:**

Bu çalışmanın hazırlanma sürecinde bilimsel ve etik ilkelere uyulduğu ve yararlanılan tüm çalışmaların kaynakçada belirtildiği beyan olunur / It is declared that scientific and ethical principles have been followed while carrying out and writing this study and that all the sources used have been properly cited.

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