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Anonymous Expressions Regarding the Theological Debates in the Commentary of al-Ṭabarī II: Some Controversial Issues Regarding the Acts of Human and the Hereafter Life

Taberî Tefsirindeki Kelami Tartışmalarla İlgili Anonim İfadeler II: İnsan Fiilleri ve Ahiret Hayatını İlgilendiren Bazı İhtilaflı Meseleler

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Abstract

The first centuries of Islamic history have witnessed many theological debates. The sectarian groups of that time have used the Qur'ānic text and the traditions in order to support their ideas. Therefore the Qur'ānic text became a field of controversial debates among the theologians of Islam. Being among the forerunner savants of Islam, Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923), also handled the main theological debates of the first three centuries of Islam in his commentary called *Jāmi' al-bayān 'an ta'wīl āy al-Qur'ān*. al-Ṭabarī, mostly, presents the theological debates among the Islamic sectarian groups without mentioning the proper names of the persons or the sects to whom the related theological views belong to. He usually uses anonymous expressions such as 'some researchers', 'some exegetes', and so on instead of giving proper names of the sectarian groups or the personalities. Therefore, in this article, the proper names of personalities and sectarian groups alluded to by al-Ṭabarī under anonymous expressions will be brought to light relying mainly on the Islamic literature. As a common method of his commentary al-Ṭabarī, mostly transmits traditions related to the theological debates he deals with, nevertheless he sometimes does not supply any tradition regarding the disputed theological topics. In this study, only the *isnāds* of the traditions quoted by al-Ṭabarī will be provided, whereas every supported view will be briefly summarised. Here we will not handle all the anonymous expressions related to the theological debates, but we will sum up some controversial theological issues regarding the acts of human and the hereafter life such as beatific vision, the definition of faith, free will, the creation of human acts, and so on.

Keywords: Exegesis, al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān*, Islamic Sects, Islamic Theology.

Öz

İslam tarihinin ilk asırları birçok kelami tartışmaya sahne olmuştur. Bu dönemlerde teşekkül eden İslam fırkaları savundukları görüşleri desteklemek için Kur'an metnini ve rivayetleri kullanmışlardır. Dolayısıyla Kur'an metni İslam âlimleri arasında ihtilafli meselelerde kullanılan bir alana dönüşmüştür. İslam âlimlerinin öncüleri arasında yer alan Muhammed b. Cerir et-Taberî (ö. 310/923) de ilk üç asır temel kelam tartışmalarını *Câmi' u'l-beyân 'an te'vîli âyi'l-Kur'ân* adlı tefsirinde ele almıştır. Taberî genellikle İslam fırkaları arasında cereyan eden kelami tartışmaları arz ederken ilgili görüşlerin ait olduğu kişi veya fırka ismini vermez. İlgili fırka veya şahsiyetlerin özel isimlerini vermek yerine çoğunlukla 'bazı araştırmacılar', 'bazı müfessirler' gibi anonim ifadeler kullanır. Dolayısıyla bu makalede Taberî'nin anonim ifadeler çerçevesinde göndermede bulunduğu şahıs ve fırkaların özel isimleri temel olarak İslam literatürü bağlamında tespit edilmeye çalışılacaktır. Tefsirinde takip ettiği metot gereği Taberî genellikle ele aldığı kelami tartışmalara bağlı rivayetler aktarırken, bazen de tartışılan konularla ilgili herhangi bir rivayet aktarmaz. Bu çalışmada Taberî'nin naklettiği rivayetlerin sadece isnadları verilecek, metinleri birebir verilmeyecektir. Bununla birlikte Taberî'nin ilgili rivayetlere bağlı olarak arz ettiği ve tefsirinde farklı şahıs veya fırka tarafından savunulan her anonim görüş de özet olarak verilecektir. Bu çalışmada Taberî'nin kelami tartışmalara bağlı olarak ele aldığı tüm anonim ifadeler işlenmeyecek, sadece 'ru'yetullah,' 'imanın tanımı,' 'hür irade,' 'insan fiillerinin yaratılması' gibi insan fiilleri ve ahiret hayatını ilgilendiren bazı ihtilafli meseleler arz edilecektir.

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

Introduction

Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) uses the main interpretation methods in his commentary which he completed in 270/884.¹ al-Ṭabarī, also, presents the main theological debates that took place in the first three centuries of Islamic history. He presents the ideas of each personality or sect, but mostly without mentioning the proper name of the personalities or the sects. Instead of giving the proper name of the personality or the sect, he uses anonymous expressions such as 'exegetes argued (ikhtalafa ahl al-ta'wīl)', 'ulema and exegetes argued

¹ Abū 'Abd Allāh al-Ḥamawī Yāqūt, *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.

(ikhtalafa ahl al-‘ilm wa ahl al-ta’wīl)’ and so on. Therefore, as the main object of this article, we will try to determine the proper names of the personalities and sects involved in the theological discussions that al-Ṭabarī deals with in his commentary within anonymous expressions. Consequently, by determining the proper names of the personalities and sects, we will reveal some sources that al-Ṭabarī used in his commentary regarding the theological debates. While trying to determine the proper names of the personalities and the sectarian groups, we will mainly use the related Islamic sources especially al-Ash‘arī’s *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn*.

However, we will not present all the anonymous expressions that al-Ṭabarī uses in his commentary related to the theological debates. The topics which we will present in this study, regarding the anonymous expressions that take place in the commentary of al-Ṭabarī, are as follows: ‘beatific vision (ru’yatullāh),’ ‘the definition of faith,’ ‘free will,’ ‘the creation of human acts,’ ‘being overburdened by the divine law (taklīfu mā lā yutāq),’ ‘mortal sins,’ and ‘torment in the grave.’

al-Ṭabarī, as a common method that he follows in his commentary, supplies traditions regarding the theological discussions that he handles. He quotes traditions which each personality or group uses to support the followed idea/s. Nevertheless he sometimes does not provide any tradition related to the theological debates that he presents. In this study, we will give just the *isnāds* (chains of transmitters) of the traditions related to the anonymous theological discussions, but leave out their texts. However, we will sum up the idea of each anonymous personality or the group who uses the related traditions to support the followed idea/s. Additionally, giving all texts of the traditions exceeds the volume of this article and does not serve its aim which is to determine the proper name of the personality or the group that al-Ṭabarī gives under anonymous expressions. Furthermore, *isnāds* are very important in terms of denoting the sources of al-Ṭabarī which he used for the subject matter.

al-Ṭabarī mentions directly only the names of *al-Qadariyya*² / *Ahl al-Qadar*³ and *al-Jahmiyya* in his commentary.⁴ He does not mention the name *al-Mu’tazila (al-Qadariyya)* in his commentary related to the theological debates.⁵ He also uses the phrases such as *Ahl al-Jadal*,⁶ *Ahl al-Ithbāt*,⁷ and so on regarding the theological debates that he deals with in his commentary.

Here we will present the theological debates of the sectarian groups that al-Ṭabarī alluded to anonymously in his commentary, that’s, without mentioning the proper name of the personality or the sectarian group:

1. Beatific Vision (Ru’yatullāh)

1.1. al-An‘ām 6/103

al-Ṭabarī gives four anonymous views regarding the theological debates on the expression *lā tudrikuhu al-absāru wa huwa yudriku al-absāra* (No human vision can encompass Him,

² 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 (twice); 3/1750; 5/3379, 3683, 3684 (in tradition); 12/7531 (in tradition).

³ al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’ al-bayān*, 1/97, 100; 2/1345; 8/5063; 11/6966; 12/7531 (twice, one in tradition).

⁴ al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’ al-bayān*, 1/158.

⁵ al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’ al-bayān*, 13/7932.

⁶ al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’ al-bayān*, 4/3131.

⁷ al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’ al-bayān*, 8/5063.

whereas He encompasses all human vision, al-An‘ām 6/103)⁸ The views and related *isnāds* of the traditions that al-Ṭabarī refers to are as follows:

1. According to some exegetes, what is meant in this verse is not that God cannot be seen, but that he cannot be encompassed. In the Hereafter, believers will look at their Lord with their bare eyes, but their sight will not be able to encompass him. Since God has stated in the verses *wujūhun yawma idhīn nādiratun / ilā rabbihā nāziratun* (Some faces will on that Day be bright with happiness / looking up to their Sustainer, al-Qiyāma 75/22-23)⁹ that some faces will look at him.

* Muḥammad b. Sa‘d *from my father from my uncle from my father from his father from Ibn ‘Abbās.*

* Bishr *from Yazīd from Sa‘īd from Qatāda.*

* Sa‘d b. ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Abd al-Ḥakam *from Khālīd b. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān from Abū ‘Ar-faja from ‘Atiyya al-‘Awfī.*

2. According to some other exegetes, the verse al-An‘ām 6/103 means that ‘the eyes cannot see God, but he sees the eyes.’ The supporters of this view point out that God cannot be seen, either in this world or in the Hereafter. The meaning of the verses al-Qiyāma 75/22-23 is ‘to wait for God’s mercy and reward.’

* Muḥammad b. al-Ḥusain *from Aḥmad b. al-Mufaḍḍal from Asbāt from al-Suddī.*

* Hannād *from Wakī‘ from Ismā‘īl b. Abī Khālīd from ‘Āmir from Masrūq from ‘Ā’isha.*

* Ibn Wakī‘ *from my father from Ismā‘īl b. Abī Khālīd from ‘Āmir from Masrūq.*

* Ibn Wakī‘ *from ‘Abd al-A‘lā and Ibn ‘Ulayya from Dāvud from al-Sha‘bī from Masrūq from ‘Ā’isha.*

* Ibn Ḥumaid *from Jarīr from Mughīra from al-Sha‘bī from ‘Ā’isha.*

3. According to some other exegetes, the verse al-An‘ām 6/103 means ‘God cannot be seen.’ However, this is a special case of ‘not being seen.’ In other words, God will not be seen in this world, but will be seen in the Hereafter, because God has stated in the verses al-Qiyāma 75/22-23 that he will be seen in the Hereafter.

4. According to another group of exegetes, the verse al-An‘ām 6/103 means ‘eyes cannot see God’, and this is a general situation and relevant for all time. God cannot be seen with bare eyes, either in this world or in the Hereafter. However, on the Day of Judgement, God will create a sixth sense organ for his friends and they will see their Lord with it.¹⁰

The first and third views belong to the Sunnis. There is no fundamental difference between the two views, because both of them point out that God will be seen with bare eyes in the Hereafter.¹¹ al-Ṭabarī attributes the first view to Ahl al-Athar (Aṣḥāb al-Ḥadīth) in *al-Tabṣīr*

⁸ Muhammad Asad, *The Message of the Qur‘ān* (İstanbul: İṣaret Yayınları, 2006), 187.

⁹ Asad, *The Message of the Qur‘ān*, 913.

¹⁰ al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-bayān*, 5/3509-3514.

¹¹ al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-bayān*, 5/3513-3514; 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-‘Āshīma, 1996), 217-219; William Montgomery Watt, *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1973), 296. Additionally, while interpreting the verse al-Baqara 2/115, al-Ṭabarī gives some anonymous views regarding the ‘face’ as an anthropomorphic attribute of God and does not make any comment related to the issue. See al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-bayān*, 1/645-646.

ft Ma'ālim al-dīn.¹² Additionally, al-Ṭabarī, in *al-Tabṣīr ft ma'ālim al-dīn*, attributes 'seeing God with bare eyes' to Hishām (?) and his followers: Abū Mālik (?), Nakha'ī (?), and Muqātil b. Sulaimān.¹³ The second view belongs to most of the Mu'tazilis, the Jahmites, the Kharijites, and some of the Murjites and Zaydites.¹⁴ al-Ṭabarī, in *al-Tabṣīr ft ma'ālim al-dīn*, attributes this view to the Jahmites themselves.¹⁵ The fourth view belongs to Dirār b. 'Amr (d. 184-205/800-820) who is a Mu'tazilī scholar, and to those who follow him regarding the issue in question such as Abū Yaḥyā Ḥaḥṣ al-Fard (d. third/ninth century?) and al-Akhfash al-Awsaṭ.¹⁶ al-Ṭabarī attributes this view to Dirār b. 'Amr in *al-Tabṣīr ft ma'ālim al-dīn*.¹⁷

1.2. al-Qiyāma 75/23

al-Ṭabarī states that, exegetes have disputed about the verse *ilā rabbihā nāẓiratun* (looking up to their Sustainer, al-Qiyāma 75/23)¹⁸ which is about Beatific Vision (Ru'yatullāh). He gives two anonymous views regarding the theological debates on the verse in question. The views and related *isnāds* of the traditions that al-Ṭabarī refers to are as follows:

1. According to some exegetes, this verse means, 'they will look at their Lord (with their bare eyes).'

* Muḥammad b. Maṣṣūr al-Ṭūsī and Ibrāhīm b. Sa'īd al-Jawharī *from* 'Alī b. al-Ḥasan b. Shaqīq *from* al-Ḥusain b. Wāqīd *from* Yazīd al-Naḥwī *from* 'Ikrima.

* Muḥammad b. 'Alī b. al-Ḥasan b. Shaqīq *from* my father *from* al-Ḥusain b. Wāqīd *from* Yazīd al-Naḥwī *from* 'Ikrima and Ismā'īl b. Abī Khālid and Ashyākh min Ahl al-Kūfa.

* Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl al-Bukhārī *from* Ādam *from* al-Mubārak *from* al-Ḥasan.

* Sa'd b. 'Abd Allāh b. 'Abd al-Ḥakam *from* Khālid b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān *from* Abū 'Ar-faja *from* 'Atiyya al-'Awfī.

2. According to some others, this verse means 'they await reward from their Lord.'

* Abū Kuraib *from* 'Umar b. 'Ubaid *from* Maṣṣūr *from* Mujāhid.

* Wakī' *from* Sufyān *from* Maṣṣūr *from* Mujāhid.

* Ibn Bashshār *from* 'Abd al-Raḥmān *from* Sufyān *from* Maṣṣūr *from* Mujāhid.

* Ibn Ḥumaid *from* Mihrān *from* Sufyān *from* Maṣṣūr *from* Mujāhid.

* Yaḥyā b. Ibrāhīm al-Mas'ūdī *from* my father *from* his father *from* his grandfather *from* al-A'mash *from* Mujāhid.

* Ibn Ḥumaid *from* Jarīr *from* Maṣṣūr *from* Mujāhid.

* Jarīr *from* Maṣṣūr *from* Mujāhid.

¹² al-Ṭabarī, *al-Tabṣīr ft ma'ālim al-dīn*, 219.

¹³ al-Ṭabarī, *al-Tabṣīr ft ma'ālim al-dīn*, 216-217.

¹⁴ See Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī b. Ismā'īl al-Ash'arī, *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn wa ikhtilāf al-muṣallīn*, ed. Na'im Zarzūr (Beirut: Maktaba al-'Aṣriyya, 2009), 1/128-130, 172-173.

¹⁵ al-Ṭabarī, *al-Tabṣīr ft ma'ālim al-dīn*, 215.

¹⁶ Abū al-Ḥasan Sa'īd b. Mas'ada al-Akhfash al-Awsaṭ, *Ma'ānī al-Qur'ān*, ed. 'Abd al-Amīr Muḥammad Amīn al-Ward (Beirut: Ālam al-Kutub, 1985), 2/531; al-Ash'arī, *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn*, 1/220-221.

¹⁷ al-Ṭabarī, *al-Tabṣīr ft ma'ālim al-dīn*, 216.

¹⁸ Asad, *The Message of the Qur'ān*, 913.

* Abū al-Khattāb al-Ḥassānī *from* Mālik *from* Sufyān *from* Ismā‘īl b. Abī Khālid *from* Abū Šāliḥ.

* Abū Kuraib *from* al-Ashja‘ī *from* Sufyān *from* Thuwair *from* Mujāhid *from* Ibn ‘Umar.

* Ibn Yamān *from* Ashja‘ *from* Abū al-Šahbā’ al-Mawšilī.

al-Ṭabarī regards the first view as correct, but rejects the second one.¹⁹ As pointed out above, while the first view belongs to the sects of Ahl al-Sunna, the second one belongs to sects such as al-Mu‘tazila, al-Jahmiyya, and so on.

2. The Definition of Faith

al-Ṭabarī gives three anonymous views related to the theological debates on the verse *qālat al-A‘rābu āmannā qul lam tu‘minū wa lākin qūlū aslamnā wa lammā yadkhul al-īmānu fī qulūbikum* (The Bedouin say, ‘We have attained to faith.’ Say [unto them, O Muhammad]: ‘You have not [yet] attained to faith; you should [rather] say, ‘We have [outwardly] surrendered’ - for [true] faith has not yet entered your hearts,’ al-Ḥujurāt 49/14).²⁰ The views and related *isnāds* of the traditions that al-Ṭabarī refers to are as follows:

1. According to some exegetes, the reason why the Prophet received such a command is that the society in the verse in question ‘professed faith only with the tongue and did not confirm this profession with their acts / deeds.’ Therefore, they were told, “do not say ‘we believe’,” because faith consists of profession and deeds.

* Ibn ‘Abd al-A‘lā *from* Ibn Thawr *from* Ma‘mar *from* al-Zuhrī.

* Ibn ‘Abd al-A‘lā *from* Ibn Thawr *from* Ma‘mar *from* al-Zuhrī *from* ‘Āmir b. Sa‘d *from* his father.

* Yūnus *from* Ibn Wahb *from* Ibn Zaid.

* Ibn Ḥumaid *from* Mihrān *from* Sufyān *from* Mughīra *from* Ibrāhīm.

2. According to some other exegetes, the people in question wanted to be called by the names of *immigrants* (muhājir) although they have not immigrated. Thus, God declared that they would be called by the names of ‘bedouins,’ not by the names of *immigrants*.

* Muḥammad b. Sa‘d *from* my father *from* my uncle *from* my father *from* his father *from* Ibn ‘Abbās.

3. According to some other exegetes, the people in question wanted to make the Prophet feel grateful to them, because of their conversion to Islam willingly (that is, without war or any other troubles). Therefore, God ordered his messenger to say, “You did not believe, but you wanted to surrender because of fear of captivity and being killed.”

* Bishr *from* Yazīd *from* Sa‘īd *from* Qatāda.

* Ibn ‘Abd al-A‘lā *from* Muḥammad b. Thawr *from* Ma‘mar *from* Qatāda.

* Ibn Ḥumaid *from* Mihrān *from* Sufyān *from* Rabāḥ Ibn Abī Ma‘rūf *from* Sa‘īd b. Jubair.

* Ibn Ḥumaid *from* Mihrān *from* Sufyān *from* a man *from* Mujāhid.

¹⁹ al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-bayān*, 14/8718-8720.

²⁰ Asad, *The Message of the Qur‘ān*, 794-795.

* Yūnus from Ibn Wahb from Ibn Zaid.²¹

al-Ṭabarī states that the correct interpretation of the verse is the first view. The first view, which al-Ṭabarī gives here with the anonymous phrase ‘some exegetes’, belongs to sects such as Aṣḥāb al-Ḥadīth, the Mu‘tazilis, the Shī‘is, the Ash‘aris and the Kharijites, who define faith as ‘confirming with the heart, confessing with the tongue, and acting.’²²

3. Free Will and the Creation of Human Acts

3.1 al-Baqara 2/7

al-Ṭabarī, while interpreting the expression *khatama Allāhu ‘alā qulūbihim wa ‘alā sam‘ihim* (God; has sealed their hearts and their hearing),²³ points out that:

According to ‘some exegetes,’ what is meant by sealing the heart here is that God informs us that the people who are mentioned here do not heed the invitation to the right path, but on the contrary, they respond to it by self-conceit and turning their backs on it. (Regarding the sectarian groups, al-Ṭabarī says here): Then tell us, ‘Are these acts of self-conceit and turning away, people’s own acts which are created by themselves, or are these acts created by God himself?’ If they claim that these acts are created by the mentioned people themselves - *and certainly they claim this* - then they are told that ‘in this verse, God says that he himself has done this sealing ...

al-Ṭabarī continues the polemic with the people whom he refers to with the anonymous expression ‘some exegetes.’²⁴

The sect that al-Ṭabarī refers to here within the anonymous expression ‘some exegetes’ is al-Mu‘tazila, because during the polemic, he states that their views about the creation of the acts of humans are that ‘the acts of self-conceit and turning away are the acts of people themselves,’ and therefore, he actually implies the sect with which he is arguing without expressing its proper name. Moreover, it is the interpretation method of al-Mu‘tazila to interpret verses which include meanings such as ‘God seals the hearts; God leads people astray, ...’ in the way mentioned above by al-Ṭabarī.²⁵

3.2 al-An‘ām 6/122

al-Ṭabarī, while interpreting the expression *kadhālika zuyyina li al-kāfirīna mā kānū ya‘malūna* ([But] thus it is: goodly seem all their own doings to those who deny the truth),²⁶ says with an anonymous expression “In this verse God rejects the claim of those who say, ‘God does not interfere with the acts of his servants, and he treats all of them equally in terms of obedience or causes that lead them to rebellion’.”²⁷

As it is clearly understood, al-Ṭabarī here refers to al-Mu‘tazila, who say that ‘the servants are the creators of their own acts / deeds.’

²¹ al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-bayān*, 13/7940-7942.

²² See al-Ash‘arī, *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn*, 1/59-60, 75, 211-214; Watt, *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought*, 292, 314-316.

²³ Asad, *The Message of the Qur‘ān*, 4.

²⁴ al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-bayān*, 1/152-153.

²⁵ See al-Ash‘arī, *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn*, 1/206, 208.

²⁶ Asad, *The Message of the Qur‘ān*, 191.

²⁷ al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-bayān*, 5/3556.

3.3. al-Anfāl 8/17

al-Ṭabarī, in the interpretation of the verse *fa lam taqtulūhum wa lākinna Allāha qatalahum wa mā ramaita idh ramaita wa lākinna Allāha ramā* (And yet, [O believers,] it was not you who slew the enemy, but it was God who slew them; and it was not thou who cast [terror into them, O Prophet], when thou didst cast it, but it was God who cast it),²⁸ says that:

God states that the act in this verse is not the Muslims', but his own, because he is the main factor for this act and he is the one who delivers the arrow to the target. Therefore, there is the clearest evidence in this verse against the claims of *those who deny the intervention of God in the acts of humans while they are performing them*.²⁹

The sect whose opinion is defined here by al-Ṭabarī as *those who deny the intervention of God in the acts of humans while they are performing them* is undoubtedly al-Mu'tazila, because according to al-Mu'tazila, 'God does not interfere in the creation of the acts of humans.'³⁰ al-Ṭabarī attributes this definition, which he makes anonymously here, to al-Qadariyya (al-Mu'tazila) itself in a derogatory style in the interpretation of the verse al-Fātiḥa 1/7.³¹

4. Being Overburdened by the Divine Law (Taklīfu mā lā yutāq)

According to al-Ṭabarī, the verses *khatama Allāhu 'alā qulūbihim wa 'alā sam'ihim wa 'alā abṣārihim ghishāwatun wa lahum 'adhābun 'azīmun* (God; has sealed their hearts and their hearing, and over their eyes is a veil; and awesome suffering awaits them, al-Baqara 2/7)³² and *yā ayyuhā al-nāsu u'budū rabbakum alladhī khalaqakum wa alladhīna min qablikum la'allakum tattaqūn* (O mankind! Worship your Sustainer, who has created you and those who lived before you, so that you might remain conscious of Him, al-Baqara 2/21)³³ are the clearest verses which indicate that the views of 'those who deny *taklīfu mā lā yutāq*' are invalid.³⁴

al-Ṭabarī here refers to al-Mu'tazila without expressing the proper name of the sect, because al-Mu'tazila is famous for denying *taklīfu mā lā yutāq*. Additionally, in the interpretation of the expression *lā tukallafu nafsun illā wus'ahā* (No human being shall be burdened with more than he is well able to bear, al-Baqara 2/233),³⁵ al-Ṭabarī explicitly and in a derogatory style states that the sect he rejects on this issue is Ahl al-Qadar (al-Mu'tazila).³⁶

Nevertheless, it is possible that al-Ṭabarī, if not directly but indirectly, rejects the related views of the Rafīdites,³⁷ the Mu'tazilis,³⁸ and of many ulema of Ahl al-Sunna such as Abū Ḥanīfa (d. 150/767) and al-Ṭahāwī (d. 321/933), who, contrary to al-Ash'arī, reject *taklīfu mā lā yutāq*.³⁹

²⁸ Asad, *The Message of the Qur'an*, 240.

²⁹ al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān*, 6/4051.

³⁰ 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), 50; Watt, *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought*, 94-98.

³¹ al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān*, 1/115-116.

³² Asad, *The Message of the Qur'an*, 4.

³³ Asad, *The Message of the Qur'an*, 6.

³⁴ al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān*, 1/153, 214.

³⁵ Asad, *The Message of the Qur'an*, 51.

³⁶ al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān*, 2/1345. See also al-Ash'arī, *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn*, 1/184.

³⁷ al-Khayyāt, *al-Intiṣār wa al-radd 'alā Ibn al-Rāwandī*, 6.

³⁸ al-Ash'arī, *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn*, 1/184, 222; Watt, *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought*, 200.

³⁹ Abū Ḥanīfa al-Nu'mān b. Thābit, *Sharḥ kitāb al-fiqh al-akbar*, ed. 'Alī al-Qārī (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 2007), 324; Abū Ja'fer al-Ṭahāwī, *al-'Aqīda al-Ṭahāwiyya* (Beirut: Dār al-Bayāriq, 2001), 25; Abū al-

5. Mortal / Grave Sins

5.1. al-Baqara 2/81

al-Ṭabarī touches on debates about the mortal sins while interpreting the verse *balā man kasaba sayyi'atan wa aḥāṭat bihi khaṭī'atuhu fa ulā'ika aṣḥābu al-nāri hum fihā khālidūna* (Yea! Those who earn evil and by their sinfulness are engulfed - they are destined for the fire, therein to abide)⁴⁰ and states that those who have sinned and will stay in Hell eternally are unbelievers, because there are many traditions which declare that 'believers will not stay in Hell forever,' and then he anonymously gives al-Mu'tazila's views and questions, and rejects them as follows. al-Ṭabarī points out that:

(A Mu'tazilī question is that): If someone thinks that 'the believers who will stay in Paradise forever, are those who do good deeds, not those who commit sins,' then regarding the issue we will say that God informs us that if we avoid the mortal sins, our other sins will be forgiven.

(A second Mu'tazilī question is that): 'God assures us that our other sins will be forgiven as long as we avoid the mortal ones. Therefore, what is the evidence that mortal sins are not the sins meant in the verse al-Baqara 2/81, [and that those who commit mortal sins will not remain in eternal Hell]?' (al-Ṭabarī answers this question by saying): There are certain traditions about the issue which are impossible to be refused, and the related traditions point out that the believers who commit mortal sins will eventually enter Paradise ...⁴¹

5.2. Hūd 11/107

al-Ṭabarī gives four anonymous views regarding the theological debates on the expression *khālidūna fihā mā dāmat al-samawātu wa al-arḍu illā mā shā'a rabbuka* (Therein to abide as long as the heavens and the earth endure - unless thy Sustainer wills it otherwise, Hūd 11/107).⁴² The views and related *isnāds* of the traditions that al-Ṭabarī refers to are as follows:

1. According to some ulema and exegetes (ahl al-'ilm wa ahl al-ta'wīl), the exception in this verse is for the people of tawḥīd. After God has thrown them into Hell, he will pull them out of Hell whenever he wills.

* al-Ḥasan b. Yaḥyā *from* 'Abd al-Razzāq *from* Ma'mar *from* Qatāda.

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

* Muḥammad b. al-Muthannā *from* Shaybān b. Farrūkh *from* Abū Hilāl *from* Qatāda.

* Ibn Ḥumaid *from* Ya'qūb *from* Abū Mālik that is, Tha'laba *from* Abū Sinān.

* Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-A'lā *from* Muḥammad b. Thawr *from* Ma'mar *from* al-Ḍaḥḥāk b. Muzāḥim.

* al-Muthannā *from* 'Abd Allāh b. Ṣāliḥ *from* Mu'āviya *from* 'Āmir b. Jashīb *from* Khālid b. Ma'dān.

Ḥasan 'Alī b. Ismā'īl al-Ash'arī, *Risāla ilā Aḥl al-Thaḡhr*, ed. 'Abd Allāh Shākir Muḥammad al-Junaidī (Medina: Maktaba al-'Ulūm wa al-Ḥikam, 2002), 260-265.

⁴⁰ Asad, *The Message of the Qur'ān*, 17.

⁴¹ al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān*, 1/496-497.

⁴² Asad, *The Message of the Qur'ān*, 331.

2. According to some others, the exception here is for the people of tawhīd, and it means that if God wishes, he will forgive their sins without putting them into Hell.

* al-Ḥasan b. Yaḥyā *from* ‘Abd al-Razzāq *from* Ibn al-Taimī *from* his father *from* Abū Naḍra *from* Jābir *or* Abū Sa‘īd al-Khudrī *or* a man from the companions of the Prophet.

3. According to others, the exception here applies to anyone who goes to Hell.

* al-Musayyāb *from* someone who mentioned him *from* Ibn ‘Abbās.

* Ibn Ḥumaid *from* Jarīr *from* Bayān *from* al-Sha‘bī.

4. According to another group of ulema and exegetes, God has declared that the people of Paradise will last forever, but he did not inform us about the people of Hell. Therefore, this exception may be about prolonging or shortening their punishment.

* Yūnus *from* Ibn wahb *from* Ibn Zaid.

al-Ṭabarī states that the first view is correct and that the exception here is about the people of tawhīd who commit mortal sins. Therefore, God finally admits these people into Paradise. There are definite traditions which ascertain this view. He points out that the second view cannot be correct, because in such a case, the view that ‘neither a sinner (fāsiq) enters Paradise nor a believer (mu’min) enters Hell’ will be accepted. He states that this view, on the other hand, is contrary to both the opinions of the ulema (ahl al-‘ilm) and the traditions.⁴³ Moreover, the third view is based on the idea that Hell will be completely empty or disappear after a long period of time. Therefore, it is not certain to which sect it belongs.

Consequently, the first and fourth views belong to the Sunni sects, because according to them, the people of tawhīd will eventually enter Paradise.⁴⁴ al-Ṭabarī rejects the view that ‘neither a sinner (fāsiq) enters Paradise nor a believer (mu’min) enters Hell’, which he gives here anonymously, but attributes it to al-Mu’tazila in *al-Tabṣīr fī ma’ālim al-dīn*,⁴⁵ because according to al-Mu’tazila, ‘a sinner (fāsiq), that is, a person who commits mortal sins, does not enter Paradise.’⁴⁶

6. Punishment / Torment in the Grave

al-Ṭabarī states that the verse *ḥattā zurtum al-maqābira* (Until you go down to your graves, al-Takāthur 102/2)⁴⁷ is clear evidence for the view that supports ‘the existence of torment in the grave.’ al-Ṭabarī says that God threatened these people, whose competition for worldly gain was preoccupying them, by declaring that they will learn what will happen to them when they die and are buried in the graves.⁴⁸

Likewise, after giving many different views regarding the phrases *sanu’adhdhibuhum marratayni* (We shall cause them to suffer doubly, al-Tawba 9/101)⁴⁹ and *ma’īshatan ḍangkan* (A life of narrow scope, Ṭā Hā 20/124),⁵⁰ al-Ṭabarī states that the correct interpretations of both

⁴³ al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’ al-bayān*, 7/4712-4715.

⁴⁴ al-Ṭahāwī, *al-‘Aqīda al-Ṭahāwiyya*, 19, 29; al-Ash‘arī, *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn*, 2/355; Ibn Abī Ya‘lā, *Ṭabaqāt al-Ḥanābila*, ed. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Sulaimān al-‘Uthaimīn (Riyadh: al-Amāna al-‘amma li al-Ihtifāl, 1999), 1/59-60. See also al-Ṭabarī, *al-Tabṣīr fī ma’ālim al-dīn*, 177-186.

⁴⁵ al-Ṭabarī, *al-Tabṣīr fī ma’ālim al-dīn*, 178.

⁴⁶ al-Ash‘arī, *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn*, 1/109; 2/355.

⁴⁷ Asad, *The Message of the Qur’ān*, 973.

⁴⁸ al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’ al-bayān*, 15/8828.

⁴⁹ Asad, *The Message of the Qur’ān*, 279.

⁵⁰ Asad, *The Message of the Qur’ān*, 484.

these phrases belong to those who accept ‘torment in the grave’ as the correct interpretation for the torment mentioned in these verses.⁵¹

Consequently, al-Ṭabarī, in all three verses given above, refers to the views of the Jahmites, the Kharijites, and some of the Mu‘tazilis, who reject ‘the existence of torment in the grave,’ and rejects their opinions;⁵² while on the other hand, he defends the views of the Sunni sects who support ‘the existence of torment in the grave.’

Conclusion

As we presented above with many examples, al-Ṭabarī does not provide the proper names of personalities or sectarian groups in many of the theological debates that he briefly handles in his commentary called *Jāmi’ al-bayān ‘an ta’wīl āy al-Qur’ān*. Contrarily, regarding the controversial theological debates, he quotes the idea/s of personalities or sectarian groups within anonymous expressions such as ‘exegetes argued (ikhtalafa ahl al-ta’wīl)’, ‘ulema and exegetes argued (ikhtalafa ahl al-‘ilm wa ahl al-ta’wīl)’ and then evaluates them in accordance within the coherence of his theological viewpoint. As we pointed out before, al-Ṭabarī, while on one hand alludes to the traditions regarding some theological debates that he handles, on the other hand he presents most of the theological debates that he covers in his commentary without providing traditions for the related discussions. Consequently, in this study, we tried to determine and bring to light the proper names of the personalities and sectarian groups which al-Ṭabarī gives within anonymous expressions. While trying to determine the related proper names, we mainly relied on the Islamic literature.

We think that, by determining the proper names of the related persons and sectarian groups which al-Ṭabarī gives within anonymous expressions will enable us to learn or at least to have an idea about the contents of many of the lost books / thoughts of the first three centuries of Islamic history. Consequently, this article will contribute to reveal the sources that al-Ṭabarī used for the theological debates.

It seems that al-Ṭabarī does not want to lengthen his commentary with the proper names of the sectarian groups, their followers and the related theological debates. This is either because al-Ṭabarī does not regard the commentary a place where the controversial theological debates are held in detail, or because he dealt with the related topics in the related works of his, or rather because the theological opinions and their followers are well known among the scholars of his age. Therefore, because the exegesis is an expertise field, he does not need to repeat proper names of the personalities or the sectarian groups regarding the controversial theological debates.

⁵¹ al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’ al-bayān*, 7/4373-4375; 9/5975-5978.

⁵² al-Ash‘arī, *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn*, 1/111; 2/318; al-Ash‘arī, *Risāla ilā Ahl al-Thaḡhr*, 279; Ibn Abī Ya‘lā, *Ṭabaqāt al-Ḥanābila*, 1/59; Watt, *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought*, 146.

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