

DELIBERATION ON THE MEANING OF 'BELIEF IN THE UNSEEN' IN THE QURAN

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***Abstract:** One of the commentators on the meaning of belief in the unseen in the verse "Those who believe in the unseen" (Al-Baqarah: 3) has mentioned some points, suggesting that it does not mean believing in hidden truths beyond human senses, but rather believing while being unseen. The commentator, who qualifies the term "unseen" in this verse, has referred to other verses as reference. The author of this article divides the commentator's speech into five sections and, in each section, on the bases of rules of literature, acceptable methods of interpretation and also the views of the interpreters has highlighted the error in the views of the commentator and has concluded that the meaning of the verse is belief in the unseen realities and it is beyond the reach of human senses.*

Key words: *Quranic studies, belief in the unseen, meaning of verse 3 of Surah Al-Baqarah, Quranic vocabulary*

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Introduction:

On one of the channels, a topic has been raised regarding the verse "Those who believe in the unseen" (Al-Baqarah: 3), which requires a response. Therefore, first, the exact words of the channel are mentioned, followed by our response to it.²

The Speaker's Words:

They have written: "The phrase 'those who believe in the unseen' has been translated by most translators as "those who believe in the unseen."

Translators have assumed that the pious ones should believe in something hidden. Then the question arises, what is this 'unseen' that one must believe in? In response, some have said it refers to the Almighty God, the Day of Judgment, or the Imam of the Time, while others have generalized it and said it includes anything beyond senses and supernatural. But in this case, the following questions arise:

1] There are verses similar to this verse, in the beginning of Surah Luqman, but without the phrase "those who believe in the unseen". Why? If the unseen is something one must believe in, why isn't it mentioned there, and if it isn't, why is it mentioned at the beginning of Surah Al-Baqarah, even though the structure of these two sets of verses is very similar?

2] If the unseen is something one must believe in, why hasn't there been an explanation in the Quranic verses to introduce the "unseen"? Is it possible for such an important condition for guiding the pious ones to remain ambiguous and not be clarified?

3] If the unseen is something we must believe in, why isn't it mentioned alongside other things to believe in verse 4? Doesn't the eloquence of the Quran require similar things to be placed together to make sentences shorter and topics clearer? Why isn't it like this: "And those who believe in what has been revealed to you and what was revealed before you," Why is there a gap?

The correct interpretation of the above statement is: "Those who believe while being unseen." Therefore, "the unseen" is not something we must believe in, but rather a state in which believing must take place.

²The text of the speaker's words is quoted without any appropriation or alteration. However, to establish a connection between the speaker's words and its critique, the speaker's discourse is divided into sections and numbers are added accordingly.

[4] The word "بالغيب" (in the unseen) in the sentence is an adverbial phrase, meaning in hiding from the people. To clarify the matter, also consider verses 20 and 21 of Surah Al-Anbiya, which introduces the pious as follows: "Those who fear their Lord unseen and are apprehensive of the Hour." (21:20-21)

[5] The word "الغيب" (the unseen) is used 12 times in the Quran and is translated as "unseen" in all instances. Similarly, in the beginning of Surah Al-Baqarah, it should be translated in the same way.

- الَّذِينَ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِالْغَيْبِ وَيُقِيمُونَ الصَّلَاةَ وَمِمَّا رَزَقْنَاهُمْ يُنفِقُونَ
- يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لِيُذَلِّبَنَّكُمْ اللَّهُ بِشَيْءٍ مِّنَ الصَّيِّدِ تَنَالَهُ أَيْدِيكُمْ وَرِمَاكُم لِيَعْلَمَ اللَّهُ مَن يَخَافُهُ بِالْغَيْبِ فَمَن
- اعْتَدَىٰ بَعْدَ ذَلِكَ قَلْبُهُ عَذَابُ أَلِيمٍ
- ذَلِكَ لِيَعْلَمَ أَنِّي لَمْ أَخُنْهُ بِالْغَيْبِ وَأَنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَهْدِي كَيْدَ الْخَائِنِينَ
- سَيَقُولُونَ ثَلَاثَةٌ رَّابِعُهُمْ كَلْبُهُمْ وَيَقُولُونَ خَمْسَةٌ سَادِسُهُمْ كَلْبُهُمْ رَجْمًا بِالْغَيْبِ وَيَقُولُونَ سَبْعَةٌ وَثَامِنُهُمْ كَلْبُهُمْ قُل رَّبِّي أَعْلَمُ بِعَدَّتِهِمْ مَا يَعْلَمُهُمْ إِلَّا قَلِيلٌ فَلَا تُمَارَ فِيهِمْ إِلَّا مِرَاءً ظَاهِرًا وَلَا تَسْتَنَفِتْ فِيهِمْ مِنْهُمْ أَحَدًا
- جَنَاتٍ عَذْنِ النَّبِيِّ وَعَدْرِ الرَّحْمَنِ عِبَادَهُ بِالْغَيْبِ إِنَّهُ كَانَ وَعْدُهُ مَأْتِيًا
- الَّذِينَ يَخْشَوْنَ رَبَّهُم بِالْغَيْبِ وَ هُمْ مِنَ السَّاعَةِ مُشْفِقُونَ
- وَ قَدْ كَفَرُوا بِهِ مِنْ قَبْلُ وَ يَذْفُقُونَ بِالْغَيْبِ مِنْ مَكَانٍ بَعِيدٍ
- وَ لَا تَزِرُ وَازِرَةٌ وِزْرَ أُخْرَىٰ وَ إِنْ تَدْعُ مُنْقَلَبَةٌ إِلَىٰ حِمْلِهَا لَا يُحْمَلْ مِنْهُ شَيْءٌ وَ لَوْ كَانَتْ ذَا قُرْبَىٰ إِنَّمَا تَنْذِرُ الَّذِينَ يَخْشَوْنَ رَبَّهُم بِالْغَيْبِ وَ أَقَامُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَ مَن تَرَكَىٰ فَإِنَّمَا يَتَرَكَىٰ لِنَفْسِهِ وَ إِلَىٰ اللَّهِ الْمَصِيرُ
- إِنَّمَا تَنْذِرُ مَن اتَّبَعَ الذِّكْرَ وَ خَشِيَ الرَّحْمَانََ بِالْغَيْبِ فَبَشِّرْهُ بِمَغْفِرَةٍ وَ أَجْرٍ كَرِيمٍ
- مَن خَشِيَ الرَّحْمَانََ بِالْغَيْبِ وَ جَاءَ بِقَلْبٍ مُّنِيبٍ
- لَقَدْ أَرْسَلْنَا رُسُلَنَا بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ وَ أَنْزَلْنَا مَعَهُمُ الْكِتَابَ وَ الْمِيزَانَ لِيَقُومَ النَّاسُ بِالْقِسْطِ وَ أَنْزَلْنَا الْحَدِيدَ فِيهِ بَأْسٌ شَدِيدٌ وَ مَنَافِعٌ لِلنَّاسِ وَ لِيَعْلَمَ اللَّهُ مَن يَنْصُرُهُ وَ رُسُلَهُ بِالْغَيْبِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ قَوِيٌّ عَزِيزٌ
- إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يَخْشَوْنَ رَبَّهُم بِالْغَيْبِ لَهُمْ مَغْفِرَةٌ وَ أَجْرٌ كَبِيرٌ

Summary of the Speaker's Words:

In these statements, several questions or issues have been raised:

1. Similar to these verses, in the beginning of Surah Luqman, there are verses, but the phrase "those who believe in the unseen" is missing. Why? If the unseen is something one must believe in, why isn't it mentioned there, and if it isn't, why is it mentioned at the beginning of Surah Al-Baqarah, even though the structure of these two sets of verses is very similar?
2. If the unseen is something one must believe in, why hasn't there been an explanation in the Quranic verses to introduce the "unseen"? Is it possible for such an important condition for guiding the pious to remain ambiguous and not be clarified?
3. If the unseen is something we must believe in, why isn't it mentioned alongside other things to believe in verse 4? Doesn't the eloquence of the Quran require similar things to be placed together to make sentences shorter and topics clearer? Why isn't it like this: "And those who believe in what has been revealed to you and what was revealed before you," Why is there a gap?
4. The phrase "in the unseen" is an adverbial phrase, and means "hidden from the people".
5. The word "الغيب" (the unseen) is used 12 times in the Quran and is translated as "unseen" in all instances. Similarly, in the beginning of Surah Al-Baqarah, it should be translated in the same way.

Critique and Analysis:

1. Regarding the first question:
Merely the similarity in structure of two sets of verses does not necessitate that those two sets should be identical in all meanings and details.

For example, in these two sets of verses, the phrase "أُولَئِكَ عَلَىٰ هُدًى مِّن رَّبِّهِمْ" (Those are upon guidance from their Lord, and it is those who are the successful) is mentioned, meaning success is attributed to those who possess the characteristics described in the preceding verses. However, in Surah Al-Baqarah, "وَالَّذِينَ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِمَا أُنزِلَ إِلَيْكَ وَمَا أُنزِلَ مِن قَبْلِكَ" (And those who believe in what has been revealed to you and what was revealed before you) is mentioned, which is not mentioned in Surah Luqman. If, according to the verses of Surah Al-Baqarah, belief in the Quran and previous heavenly books is a condition for success, then why is it not mentioned in Surah Luqman?

2. Regarding the second question, why hasn't there been an explanation in the Quranic verses to introduce the "unseen"?

Firstly, the concept of "the unseen" is clear.

Secondly, reference is made to some of its prominent examples, such as God and the angels, in other verses:

وَلَكِنَّ الْبِرَّ مَنْ آمَنَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ وَالْمَلَائِكَةِ وَالْكِتَابِ وَالنَّبِيِّينَ
وَمَنْ يُكْفُرْ بِاللَّهِ وَمَلَائِكَتِهِ وَكُتُبِهِ وَرُسُلِهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ فَقَدْ ضَلَّ ضَلَالًا بَعِيدًا

Thirdly, it is quite clear that Allah has expressed His intention and commands through two avenues: the Quranic revelation and the statements of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him and his progeny) and his successors (peace be upon them). Many religious matters are elaborated in the statements of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him and his progeny) and his infallible successors (peace be upon them), not limited to the Quran. For example, one of the most important acts of worship, prayer, is mentioned in the Quran with some ambiguity, and its method is not fully explained in the Quran. This matter has been clarified by Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him and his progeny) and his infallible successors (peace be upon them).

3. As for the third question, if the unseen is something we must believe in, why isn't it mentioned alongside other things to believe in verse 4? Doesn't the eloquence of the Quran necessitate that similar things be mentioned together?

In response, it can be said:

It is not necessary that eloquence demand similar things to be mentioned together. Where has this principle come from? A topic in the science of eloquence known as "concurrency, allusion, and parity." Moreover, sometimes concurrency may align better with eloquence and rhetoric.

4. In the fourth doubt, it is stated that the word "بالغيب" (in the unseen) in the phrase is an adverb, meaning hidden from people.

In response we say:

What does "believing in the unseen in hiding from people" mean? Does it mean they believe in solitude but not in the presence of people?

Or: Does it mean they believe in solitude but do not openly express their faith in the presence of people?

Although in some verses "بالغيب" (in the unseen) is indeed an adverb or, as the respected author puts it, a "qualifier," its presence in the verse "يُؤْمِنُونَ بِالْغَيْبِ" (they believe in the unseen) does not have a clear meaning.

5. The esteemed author continues: The word "بالغيب" (in the unseen) has been used 12 times in the Quran and is translated as "in the unseen" in all cases.

In response we say:

Contrary to what the respected author has stated, the phrase "بالغيب" (in the unseen) certainly does not mean "in hiding" in some of these 12 instances.

One example is in Surah Al-Kahf, verse 22: "رَجُمًا بِالْغَيْبِ" (they cast [lots] concerning the unseen).

There are two possibilities regarding the meaning of "غيب" (the unseen) in this verse:

- It either means "assumption and conjecture," and "رَجُمًا بِالْغَيْبِ" (they cast [lots] concerning the unseen) means "casting assumption and conjecture, meaning guessing."³
- Or it means "something hidden and concealed," and "رَجُمًا بِالْغَيْبِ" (they cast [lots] concerning the unseen) means "casting hidden and concealed news, mostly unseen, with the meaning of 'guessing the unseen.'"

"بالغيب" means "in the unseen," referring to having conjecture or belief in the unseen and the hidden.⁴

"رَجُمًا بِالْغَيْبِ": Throwing the unseen hidden news that they are unaware of and coming with it is like saying they throw up the unseen or bring it or throwing with suspicion. Then it was said, conjecturing with the unseen.

"رَجُمًا بِالْغَيْبِ": Throwing out news of what is hidden and unseen from them the one of which they are not informed and they bring it and assume it.

³As stated by Tabarsi in "Majma' al-Bayan fi 'Ulum al-Quran," vol. 6, p. 710, footnote to verse 22 of Surah Al-Kahf.

⁴Zamakhshari, Al-Kashaf 'An Haqiqat Ghawamiz al-Tanzil wa 'Uyun al-Aqawil fi Wujuh al-Ta'wil: Vol. 2, p. 710, footnote to verse 22 of Surah Al-Kahf."

So, in none of the possibilities in this verse is "بالغيب" meant to signify "in hiding." Rather, according to the statements of some commentators like Zamakhshari and Alusi, in one possibility, it precisely means "something unseen." Additionally, "رَجْمًا بِالْغَيْبِ" exactly implies "speculation about the unseen," meaning presuming something unseen and invisible.

Another instance where "بالغيب" does not necessarily mean "in hiding" is in the seventh case, which is verse 53 of Surah Saba: "وَيَقْدِفُونَ بِالْغَيْبِ مِنْ مَكَانٍ بَعِيدٍ" (And they throw at the unseen from a distant place). One of the possibilities in this verse is indeed "something unseen and invisible," for example, a hidden news. This interpretation is also quoted from Zamakhshari.

"رَجْمًا بِالْغَيْبِ": It means throwing something hidden and unseen, which is unknown to them, and coming with it. As in the saying: "وَيَقْدِفُونَ بِالْغَيْبِ" (And they throw at the unseen), meaning they come with it.

So, in ninecases other than verse 3 of Surah Al-Baqarah, which is the subject of discussion, "بالغيب" is not necessarily meant to signify "in hiding," and the same holds true for verse 53 of Surah Saba, based on a different possibility than the one discussed earlier.

Explanation:

The "باء" (baa) in "بالغيب" in this category of verses signifies "فى" (fi), meaning "in" or "with," and "بالغيب" syntactically belongs to the omitted state. For example, in the 11th instance, in the case of verse 25 of Surah Al-Hadid: "وَلِيَعْلَمَ اللَّهُ مَنْ يَنْصُرُهُ وَرُسُلَهُ بِالْغَيْبِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ قَوِيٌّ عَزِيزٌ" (So that Allah may know who supports Him and His messengers in the unseen. Indeed, Allah is Powerful and Mighty), "بالغيب" pertains to the word "كائنين", which represents the omitted state. In this manner:

"So that Allah may know who supports Him and His messengers being in the unseen." In this context, the question arises whether this state is related to the subject or the object.

In the first case, where the subject of the verb is the active agent, the meaning of the sentence is as follows:

"So that God may know those who assist Him and His messengers, while those individuals are absent and concealed."

In the second case, where the subject of the verb is the recipient of the action, the meaning of the sentence is as follows:

"So that God may know those whom He assists along with His messengers, while He and His messengers are absent and concealed."

These two possibilities exist in other similar cases as well, such as:

" (Fatir: 18): يَخْشَوْنَ رَبَّهُم بِالْغَيْبِ "

Meaning, "They fear their Lord in the unseen," where "بالغيب" pertains to the subject or the object.

" (Mumtahina: 94): لِيَعْلَمَ اللَّهُ مَنْ يَخَافُهُ "

Meaning, "So that Allah may know who fears Him in the unseen," where "بالغيب" pertains to the subject or the object.

" (Maryam: 61): جَنَّاتٍ عَدْنٍ الَّتِي وَعَدَ الرَّحْمَنُ عِبَادَهُ بِالْغَيْبِ "

Meaning, "Gardens of perpetual residence, which the Beneficent has promised His servants in the unseen," where "بالغيب" pertains to the subject or the object.

This means that "the promise of the Beneficent to His servants" refers to gardens that God has promised to His servants while He Himself, meaning God, is concealed (the state of the subject), or those gardens are unseen and hidden, or those servants are in concealment and unseen (the state of the object).

And similarly, there are other cases mentioned above to which they refer.

The appearance of the above verses indicates that although "in the unseen" is the meaning attributed to "بالغيب" in them, in all cases, "بالغيب" functions as a state of the object rather than a state of the subject.

For example, in the verse "وَلِيَعْلَمَ اللَّهُ مَنْ يَنْصُرُهُ وَرُسُلَهُ بِالْغَيْبِ" (Surah Al-Hadid 57:25), the meaning of the verse is as follows: "So that Allah may know those who support Him and His messengers unseen, and with the unseen being the condition of their support."

In the verse "يَنْصُرُهُ أَي غَائِبًا عَنْهُمْ فِي الدُّنْيَا"⁵ (Surah Ar-Rad, 13:40), the meaning is that Allah supports His servants while being unseen by them in the world, not that

⁵Darwish, "A'rab al-Qur'an waBayanuh," Vol. 9, p. 474; under verse 25 of Surah Al-Hadid.

He supports them after knowing who helps Him in hiding or secrecy, not openly and visibly.

Similarly, in the verse "جَنَّاتٍ عَدْنٍ الَّتِي وَعَدَ الرَّحْمَنُ عِبَادَهُ بِالْغَيْبِ" (Surah Maryam, 19:61), the meaning is: "Gardens of perpetual residence, which the Beneficent has promised His servants in the unseen," where "بِالْغَيْبِ" pertains to the object. It means that Allah promised those gardens to His servants while those gardens are unseen and hidden from them⁶, not that He Himself is unseen (pertaining to the subject).

Based on what has been discussed, in verse 2:3 of Surah Al-Baqarah: "Those who believe in the unseen," even if "بِالْغَيْبِ" is not attributed to the believers and is instead an object, as in all similar cases in the Quran, it is a state from the object, not from the subject. Of course, in this assumption, the object will be omitted, as follows:

"They believe in something being absent from them" or "They believe in things being absent from them." Similarly, if we consider it as a state from the subject, which would be incompatible with other similar cases, still the object will be omitted, meaning "They believe in something or things being absent from them." It means they believe in something or things that are absent from them, and this meaning implies the hidden and unseen nature of that thing or things.

Even if we insist that "بِالْغَيْبِ" in this verse is contrary to similar cases and is a state from the subject, not from the object, and means "being hidden," we must specify what the believers are hidden from. If the intention of "being hidden" is to be hidden from the object, then, as mentioned earlier, the meaning of the verse would be that the believers have faith in something that is hidden from them, meaning they do not see it. However, if the intention of "being hidden" is to be alone, then the meaning would be that the believers have faith when they are alone and secluded, which is not a correct interpretation.

⁶Ibid., Vol. 6, p. 123; under verse 61 of Surah Maryam.