The third category mentioned in Surah Baqarah is not an easy one to explain as the issue is not straightforward. This is the most complicated group of people and thus, Allah ( سبحانه و تعالى) uses many examples to illustrate the condition of these people.

نفاق in the light of the Quran

Our attitude towards this subject is too casual. When we read these ayaat, we immediately think of someone whom we casually point out as a hypocrite (often we are judging some physical trait or habit of that person). We should note that there is nobody in the Quran who earned more of Allah’s anger than this group. Hence, it is a BIG DEAL to label just anybody a hypocrite ourselves.

There is a big difference between someone struggling with their imaan and a hypocrite. We also have to make a distinction between a hypocrite at the time of the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) and a hypocrite now. There is a vast difference. Consider this: The people of the time of the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) listened to the message of the Quran directly in the voice of the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم). The people who believed in him and sided with him during all hardships, we cannot compare their imaan with the level of imaan we have today. Similarly, we cannot compare the level of disbelief and the level of hypocrisy at that time, with our time today.

However, Allah ( سبحانه و تعالى) went out of his way to not name anyone who was a hypocrite. Similarly, the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) did not name any names. However, there was one person about whom everyone knew that he was a hypocrite: Abdullah Ibn Ubayy (even though he was also never named as one).

The Known Hypocrite

Abdullah Ibn Ubayy was from the tribe of Khazraj and the de facto leader/governor of Yathrib (the city of Madina was called Yathrib before the arrival of the Prophet ). There were 12 counties in Yathrib and all of them decided to unite and to elect Abdullah Ibn Ubayy as their king. Just days before he was about to take oath, the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) arrived and the whole thing dissolved. The majority of the people of Madina now sided with the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) becoming leader. Abdullah Ibn Ubayy, very unhappy with the situation, decided to still rally behind the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) to work his way up the hierarchy and establish himself in a leadership (or as close as possible) position.

However, the closest people to the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) were those who had born all the difficulties in Makkah and who had migrated along with him to Madina leaving everything behind. Therefore, it was not easy to infiltrate that group and become close to the leadership. Even so, Abdullah Ibn Ubayy used to show up early for every prayer (especially Fajr) and whenever the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) was about to speak, he used to announce to the gathering that the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) was about to speak. He was an invited MC at every event.

When the Battle of Badr happened, he (being a politician) never wanted to risk his own skin and go into battle. He and his group had only accepted Islam because it was better for them politically.

Now, there was another group of people in Madina who had also become Muslim because that was the popular thing to do but they had no idea what they were signing up for. In
reality, if anybody at that time accepted Islam, this meant that they were to join forces with the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) and clash directly with the people of Quraish; it meant becoming enemy number 1 to the most powerful tribe in Arabia (Quraish). Hence this group of people too were not ready to join the battle of Badr as they were not mentally ready to make the kind of sacrifices Islam required them to make. They took a step back and the one who rallied them around him, was Abdullah Ibn Ubayy.

The Jews of Madina

The Jews of Madina were of two categories:

1. **Heads or Rabbis of Jews:** They were the ones highest in learning and scholarship. They were well-versed with their own books and teachings and recognized the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) through the signs mentioned in their books, immediately. And it terrified them. Why? Because now they were in danger of losing their high teaching positions and make way for the new teacher (that is, the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم)). To deal with that fear, they began changing their khutbahs (sermons) - before, they were always talking about the signs of the final Messenger but now that they recognized who he was, they began to shift the emphasis away from the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم).

2. **Those Jews who listened to the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم)** and figured out (due to the Rabbis’ sermons) that this is indeed the final Prophet. They hurried to their teachers (the Rabbis) and asked them about the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم). The Rabbis asked them to not listen to the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) and play ignorant. The reason why the Rabbis asked these groups of Jews to do was so that they can easily deny the presence of the Messenger (صلى الله عليه وسلم) and preserve their own teachings.

Hence the Jewish community said to the Muslims that we are just like you; we believe in God and a kind of Judgement Day (they skipped Prophethood) and hence, they tried to pass off their faith (which was incomplete) as good enough.

وَمِنَ النَّاسِ ﻣَنْ يَقُولُ آﻣَنَ ﺑِﺎﻟلﱠـﻪِ وَﺑِﺎﻟْﯿَﻮْمِ اﻵْﺧِﺮِ وَمَا هُمْ بِمُؤْمِنِينَ

And of the people are some who say, "We believe in Allah and the Last Day," but they are not believers.

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--- from the people. This is so general; does not point to any particular group of people.

--- who says (and will keep saying it). Again, the word من indicates "someone", not a particular name.

Allah ( سبحانه و تعالى) does not want to expose who they are. This is part of the Sunnah of Allah and we should preserve it by not naming/pointing out hypocrites in our own society because first, we don't know anybody’s state of the heart (only Allah Knows) and second, we wouldn't be following the sunnah of Allah ( سبحانه و تعالى) by doing so.
So these people are only able to bring themselves to mention iman (faith) in Allah ( سبحانه و تعالى) and in the Hereafter. They are unable to say that they believe in the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) as they have too much hatred for the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم).

Then Allah ( سبحانه و تعالى) says that they are not among the مؤمنين (believers). Allah ( سبحانه و تعالى) could have said مسلمين right? We know that Iman has two sides: A side involving the tongue (everyone can hear) and a side involving the heart (nobody can know). A Muslim is one who declares faith via the tongue. It is binary (either you have Islam or you don’t). But a Moumin is one who has imaan in the heart. Imaan is like water in a container; it fills up or drains. We have no way of knowing the level of imaan in anyone. The opposite of Muslim and Moumin is Kaafir (كافر). And Kaafir also has a range of disbelief (from having no Islam to having no Imaan). Hence, this ayah teaches us that when we see Islam in someone, we have to assume that they are Moumin (not just Muslim). A profound lesson from just these three words: وَمَا هُم بَعْزَمْهُمّ