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Surah At-Tahrim

The Prohibition · Madani · 12 ayat — reflections on
surah 66 of the Qur'an

QURAN

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Surah At-Tahrim

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التحريم — At-Tahrim, “The Prohibition”. Surah 66 of 114, revealed in Madinah, 12 ayat. The full text and a recitation are on the web edition at deen2u.com/quran/66/.

ONE

The surah in brief

Occasioned by a household matter among the Prophet's wives, the surah reminds that no one, however close, is above God's law, calls believers to guard themselves and their families from the Fire and to sincere repentance, and contrasts the wives of Nuh and Lut with Asiyah and Maryam.

At-Tahrim addresses an episode in the Prophet's household where he forbade himself something lawful to please his wives, and Allah gently corrected this and taught the way of expiating an oath. It counsels the wives toward repentance and sincerity, and then broadens into a command that reaches every believer: guard yourselves and your families from a Fire whose fuel is people and stones. It calls for sincere, unswerving repentance (tawba nasuh) and closes with four women as archetypes of the soul, the wives of Nuh and Lut who betrayed righteous husbands and were not spared, and Asiya the wife of Pharaoh and Maryam, who stayed faithful amid corruption, teaching that destiny turns on one's own faith, not one's household.

OCCASIONS OF REVELATION

Why it was revealed

These are the occasions (asbāb al-nuzūl) that the authentic collections narrate for verses of this surah. An occasion explains a verse; it does not limit its meaning.

Qur'an 66:1-4

The Prophet used to drink honey at Zainab bint Jahsh's house. 'A'isha and Hafsa decided to tell him he smelled of maghafir, and he said he would never drink it again. Allah revealed "O Prophet! Why do you ban for you that which Allah has made lawful for you," addressing 'A'isha and Hafsa.

"So there was revealed: 'O Prophet ! Why do you ban (for you) that which Allah has made lawful for you"

'A'isha · Sahih al-Bukhari 5267

Qur'an 66:5

'Umar heard that the Prophet had blamed some of his wives and told them Allah might give him better wives than them. Allah revealed this verse in almost the same words, one of three matters in which 'Umar said his Lord agreed with him.

"You should either stop (troubling the Prophet ﷺ) or else Allah will give His Apostle better wives than you."

'Umar ibn al-Khattab (via Anas) · Sahih al-Bukhari 4483

TWO

Its themes

- Correcting a household affair
- Sincere repentance (tawba nasuh)
- Guarding family from the Fire
- Faith is individual, not inherited
- Women as models of the soul

THREE

Key verses

O ye who believe! save yourselves and your families from a Fire whose fuel is Men and Stones, over which are (appointed) angels stern (and) severe, who flinch not (from executing) the Commands they receive from Allah, but do (precisely) what they are commanded.

Qur'an 66:6

Guard yourselves and your families from a Fire, its fuel people and stones. Al-Sa'di explains this obliges teaching and disciplining one's household in faith, not just praying for them.

O ye who believe! Turn to Allah with sincere repentance: In the hope that your Lord will remove from you your ills and admit you to Gardens beneath which Rivers flow,- the Day that Allah will not permit to be humiliated the Prophet and those who believe with him. Their Light will run forward before them and by their right hands, while they say, "Our Lord! Perfect our Light for us, and grant us Forgiveness: for Thou hast power over all things."

Qur'an 66:8

Turn to Allah in sincere repentance (tawbatan nasuha). The scholars define nasuh as regret, immediate ceasing, and firm resolve never to return, a repentance that mends what it touches.

Allah sets forth, for an example to the Unbelievers, the wife of Noah and the wife of Lut: they were (respectively) under two of our righteous servants, but they were false to their (husbands), and they profited nothing before Allah on their account, but were told: "Enter ye the Fire along with (others) that enter!"

Qur'an 66:10

The wives of Nuh and Lut were under two righteous servants yet betrayed them, and their marriage availed them nothing before Allah. Ibn Kathir draws the lesson that closeness to the righteous saves no one whose own heart rejects faith.

And Allah sets forth, as an example to those who believe the wife of Pharaoh: Behold she said: "O my Lord! Build for me, in nearness to Thee, a mansion in the Garden, and save me from Pharaoh and his doings, and save me from those that do wrong";

Qur'an 66:11

Allah presents the wife of Pharaoh, who prayed, 'My Lord, build me a house near You in Paradise.' She lived amid the greatest tyranny yet her faith was untouched by it.

And Mary the daughter of 'Imran, who guarded her chastity; and We breathed into (her body) of Our spirit; and she testified to the truth of the words of her Lord and of His Revelations, and was one of the devout (servants).

Qur'an 66:12

And Maryam, who guarded her chastity and believed in her Lord's words, a model of purity and devotion. Her example seals the surah's point that faith, not surroundings, decides the soul.

FOUR

Reading it closely

Context & character

At-Tahrim (The Prohibition) is a Madinan surah whose opening addresses an episode within the Prophet's own household. To please some of his wives, the Prophet ﷺ had forbidden to himself something that was in fact lawful — the reports mention honey, or his bondwoman Mariya — and a confidence he had shared with one wife was passed to another. The surah gently corrects this, teaching that even the Prophet ﷺ is not to forbid what God has made lawful, and it counsels his wives.

Its character opens in the intimate space of the home and then widens into universal counsel. From a private matter it draws lessons about the primacy of God's pleasure, the seriousness of the prophetic household as a model, the duty to guard oneself and one's family from the Fire, and — in its closing verses — the standalone accountability of the soul, illustrated by four unforgettable women.

The tone is corrective yet tender toward the Prophet ﷺ, firm toward his wives, and finally expansive, holding up ruin and salvation in the persons of two failed wives of prophets and two triumphant women of faith.

How the surah unfolds

It opens with the correction: 'O Prophet, why do you forbid yourself what God has made lawful for you, seeking the pleasure of your wives?' (66:1). God is Forgiving, Merciful, and has

ordained for you the dissolution of your oaths (through expiation) (66:2). It recounts the leaked confidence: when the Prophet confided a matter to one of his wives and she disclosed it, God informed him; he made part of it known and withheld part, and when he told her, she asked how he knew — ‘He said, the All-Knowing, the All-Aware informed me’ (66:3).

The two wives concerned are then addressed: ‘If you two turn to God in repentance, for your hearts have inclined — but if you support one another against him, then God is his Protector, and Gabriel, and the righteous of the believers, and the angels beyond that are his supporters’ (66:4). And a sobering possibility: were he to divorce you, his Lord might well give him in your place wives better than you — submitting, believing, devout, repentant, worshipping, given to fasting — previously married and virgins (66:5).

The surah then broadens into universal counsel: ‘O you who believe, guard yourselves and your families against a Fire whose fuel is people and stones, over which are angels stern and severe, who do not disobey God in what He commands them and do what they are commanded’ (66:6). It calls the believers to a sincere repentance (tawbatan nasuha), by which their Lord may remit their sins and admit them to gardens, on a Day when God will not disgrace the Prophet and those who believed with him — their light racing before them and on their right, as they pray, ‘Our Lord, perfect for us our light and forgive us’ (66:8).

It directs the Prophet ﷺ to strive against the disbelievers and hypocrites and be firm with them (66:9), and then closes with four women held up as examples. For the disbelievers: the wife

of Nuh and the wife of Lut, each married to a righteous servant of God, yet each betrayed her husband, so their prophets could avail them nothing — ‘Enter the Fire with those who enter’ (66:10). For the believers: the wife of Pharaoh, who prayed, ‘My Lord, build for me a house near You in the Garden, and save me from Pharaoh and his deeds, and save me from the wrongdoing people’ (66:11); and Maryam daughter of ‘Imran, who guarded her chastity, into whom God breathed of His spirit, and who ‘believed in the words of her Lord and His scriptures, and was of the devoutly obedient’ (66:12).

The major themes, in depth

The first theme is the primacy of God's law over every other desire, even the wish to please those one loves. That the surah opens by correcting the Prophet ﷺ himself — ‘why do you forbid what God has made lawful?’ — teaches with great force that no one is to bend or restrict God's rulings to keep others happy. The pleasure of God comes before the pleasure of people, and the lawful is not to be treated as forbidden.

The second theme is the weight of the prophetic household as an exemplar, and the counsel to his wives. Because their conduct carries public meaning, they are called to repentance, discretion, and devotion, and reminded of the qualities of ideal believing women (66:5). The home of the Prophet ﷺ is held to a standard befitting its role as a model for the community.

The third theme is spiritual guardianship of the family: ‘guard yourselves and your families against a Fire’ (66:6). Salvation is not only a private project; the believer is responsible for shepherding those in his care toward faith and away from ruin.

Paired with the call to sincere repentance (tawba nasuha), the surah sketches a whole program of self-reform and household-reform.

The fourth theme, carried by the four women, is that faith is personal and non-transferable. The wives of Nuh and Lut were married to prophets, yet their disbelief doomed them — proximity to righteousness saved neither. Asiya, the wife of Pharaoh, flourished in faith inside the house of the worst tyrant, and Maryam attained the heights in her purity and obedience. The lesson is stark: no righteous spouse can save the faithless, and no corrupt environment can doom the truly faithful. Each soul stands before God on the strength of its own belief.

Points of reflection

The surah warns against ever trading God's pleasure for the approval of people, even beloved people. To forbid the lawful or bend the truth to keep others content is a subtle disloyalty that the opening verse names in the Prophet ﷺ himself so that no follower could think it beneath notice.

It lays on the believer a duty of care for his household — 'guard yourselves and your families' — making faith a matter of leadership at home, and it points the way through sincere, decisive repentance that God meets with light on the Day of reckoning.

Most powerfully, its four women teach that one's fate is one's own. Neither the wife of a prophet is saved by her husband nor the wife of a tyrant condemned by hers; Asiya prayed for a

house near God from within Pharaoh's palace, and Maryam rose by her own devotion. The surah frees and burdens each soul with the responsibility of its own faith.

FIVE

Carrying it

1. Take responsibility for your family's faith, not only your own.
2. Make repentance sincere: regret, stop, and resolve firmly.
3. No relationship, however holy, substitutes for your own belief.
4. Faith can flourish even inside a corrupt environment.

Where this reading draws from. Ibn Kathir, al-Sa'di, al-Qurtubi. A summary is not a tafsir: for the verse-by-verse treatment go to the works themselves, or to the close studies at deen2u.com/tadabbur/.