Likely from the year 7/629, \textit{al-Taḥrīm} is a Madinan \textit{sūrah}, although a minority maintain that only the first nine verses are Madinan and that the last three are Makkān (Āl). It takes its name from the opening verse, in which the Prophet is told not to forbid for himself what God has permitted for him. Along these lines, it is also known as \textit{Limā tuḥarrimu,} “Why Dost Thou Forbid?” (Āl), and as \textit{al-Mutaḥḥaram,} “The Forbidden” (Suyūṭī, \textit{Itqān}). Since it directly addresses the Prophet’s family situation, it is also known as \textit{Sūrat al-Nabī,} “The \textit{sūrah} of the Prophet” (Āl, Z).

Whereas the first half of the previous \textit{sūrah} provides details for divorce pertaining to all women, the subject of this \textit{sūrah} is the relationship between the Prophet and his wives (vv. 1–5). This is followed by injunctions instructing the believers on how to protect themselves and repent (vv. 6, 8), warning the disbelievers of their fate (v. 7), and enjoining the Prophet to strive against those who do not accept the revelation (v. 9). The final verses (vv. 10–12) provide examples of believing and disbelieving women. In providing examples of women whose state of virtue stood in stark contrast to that of their husbands, it demonstrates that everyone, even the wives of the Prophet, is responsible for the state of his or her own soul. In this way it complements \textit{Sūrah 60, al-Muntaḥanah,} the last verses of which emphasize the manner in which women made their own pledge with the Prophet.

\textbf{In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful}
O Prophet! Why dost thou forbid that which God has made lawful unto thee, seeking the good pleasure of thy wives? And God is Forgiving, Merciful. God has already ordained for you the absolution of your oaths. And God is your Master. He is the Knower, the Wise. When the Prophet confided a certain matter to one of his wives, but she divulged it, and God showed it to him, he made known part of it and held back part of it. When he informed her of it, she said, “Who informed thee of this?” He replied, “The Knower, the Aware informed me.” If you both repent unto God . . . For your hearts did certainly incline, and if you aid one another against him, then truly God, He is his Protector, as are Gabriel and the righteous among the believers; and the angels support him withal. It may be that if he divorces you, his Lord would give him wives in your stead who are better than you, submitting, believing, devoutly obedient, penitent, worshipping, and given to wayfaring—previously married, and virgins. O you who believe! Shield yourselves and your families from a Fire whose fuel is men and stones, over which are angels, stern and severe, who do not disobey God in what He commands of them and who do what they are commanded. O you who disbelieve! Make no excuses this day! You are only requited for that which you used to do. O you who believe! Repent unto God with sincere repentance. It may be that your Lord will absolve you of your evil deeds and cause you to enter Gardens with rivers running below—the Day when God will not disgrace the Prophet and those who believe with him, with their light spreading before them.
and on their right, while they say, “Our Lord, complete our light for us and forgive us. Truly Thou art Powerful over all things.” O Prophet! Strive against the disbelievers and the hypocrites, and be harsh with them. Their refuge is Hell. What an evil journey’s end! God sets forth as an example for those who disbelieve the wife of Noah and the wife of Lot. They were under two of Our righteous servants; then they betrayed them, and they availed them naught against God. And it was said unto both, “Enter the Fire with those who enter.” And God sets forth as an example for those who believe the wife of Pharaoh when she said, “My Lord, build for me a house near unto Thee in the Garden, deliver me from Pharaoh and his deeds, and deliver me from the wrongdoing people,” and Mary, the daughter of ʿImrān, who preserved her chastity. Then We breathed therein of Our Spirit, and she confirmed the Words of her Lord and His Books; and she was among the devoutly obedient.

**Commentary**

O Prophet! Why dost thou forbid that which God has made lawful unto thee, seeking the good pleasure of thy wives? And God is Forgiving, Merciful.

1 This verse was reportedly revealed after the Prophet had sworn to his wife Ḥafṣah that he would no longer have intimate relations with his Coptic slave girl, Māriyah. The Prophet had been intimate with Māriyah in Ḥafṣah’s apartment on Ḥafṣah’s day (the Prophet’s wives rotated, each having one day with him in turn). When Ḥafṣah became upset, the Prophet asked her to tell no one of it and then told Māriyah that she was forbidden to him, after which this verse and the following
verses were revealed (Q, Sy, Ṭ, W), according to some after a period of twenty-one days (W). According to others, this verse was revealed after the Prophet forbade a certain beverage to himself that God had not forbidden, though it could apply to any instance in which the Prophet might have forbidden something that was permitted to him (Ṭ), an error that all Muslims are counseled to avoid, as in 5:87: 
O you who believe! Forbid not the good things that God has made lawful unto you (see also 6:140).

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2 God has already ordained for you the absolution of your oaths. And God is your Master. He is the Knower, the Wise.

2 The absolution for breaking oaths is found in 5:89: the feeding of ten indigent people with the equivalent of that which you feed your own family, or clothing them, or fasting three days if one does not have the means to feed and clothe others. According to some commentators, in this instance the Prophet made expiation for going back on the oath to not be intimate with Māriyah by freeing a slave (JJ). Others maintain that, as God had absolved him of the oath, there was no need for expiation (JJ).

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3 When the Prophet confided a certain matter to one of his wives, but she divulged it, and God showed it to him, he made known part of it and held back part of it. When he informed her of it, she said, “Who informed thee of this?” He replied, “The Knower, the Aware informed me.”

3 She divulged it refers to Ḥafṣah’s telling Āʾishah, another of the Prophet’s wives, of the Prophet’s intimacy with Māriyah in Ḥafṣah’s apartment, though the Prophet had requested that Ḥafṣah say nothing of it. When he asked her if she had spoken of the matter, she denied doing so (W). The Prophet then informed Ḥafṣah of some of what she had divulged and passed over some of it out of kindness toward her (JJ, Ṭs), or else God informed the Prophet of some of it and passed over some of it.
4 If you both repent unto God . . . For your hearts did certainly incline, and if you aid one another against him, then truly God, He is his Protector, as are Gabriel and the righteous among the believers; and the angels support him withal.

4 You both is an address to Ḥafṣah and Āʾishah. The response to the elided conditional phrase if you both repent unto God is understood to be “it will be accepted of both of you” (JJ). Their hearts inclined to the prohibition of Māriyā (JJ), thus to the Prophet’s prohibiting what God had made licit. That their hearts inclined is understood by some to mean that they swerved or deviated from the truth (Q, Ṭ). If the two wives were to aid one another in continuing to oppose the Prophet and thus failing to repent, this verse informs them, they would then be opposing the side of God, the believers, and the angels, all of whom assist the Prophet against those who harm him (Ṭ). The righteous among the believers is taken as a reference to ʿUmar and Abū Bakr, who were the fathers of Ḥafṣah and Āʾishah, respectively; to the best among the believers (Ṭ, Ṭs, Ṭū); or to the prophets (Ṭ, Ṭs). In Shiite commentaries, it is understood as a reference to ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib (Qm, Ṭs, Ṭū), and it is reported that the Prophet took ʿAlī by the hand and said, “O people! This one is the righteous among the believers” (Ṭs).

5 It may be that if he divorces you, his Lord would give him wives in your stead who are better than you, submitting, believing, devoutly obedient, penitent, worshipping, and given to wayfaring—previously married, and virgins.

5 This verse is addressed to the Prophet’s wives, chastising them for succumbing to jealousy and forcing the Prophet to forbid what God had permitted. It can also be taken in a broader sense as a reminder to all believers to honor their spouses. Submitting translates muslimāt, indicating submission and thus humility before God (Ṭ). Devoutly obedient (qānit) indicates spiritual and religious obedience and conveys constancy and serenity (see 4:34c). In the Quran, words
derived from the root \textit{q-n-t} relate exclusively to obedience toward and worship of God, not obedience to human beings (cf. 2:116, 238; 3:17, 43; 4:34; 16:120; 33:31, 35; 39:9). \textit{Given to wayfaring} translates \textit{sā’iḥāt}, which in this context would refer to those given to emigrating for the sake of their religion (JJ, T). From another perspective, it could indicate those who travel the spiritual path. \textit{Sā’iḥāt} can also mean “given to fasting,” which in this context is interpreted to have a broader meaning, that of preserving one’s limbs from any disobedient acts (Iṣ). Although more commentators seem to interpret it to mean “given to fasting,” such interpretations may arise from later attempts to limit the roles of women; see 9:112c.

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\begin{itemize}
\item [6] O you who believe! Shield yourselves and your families from a Fire whose fuel is men and stones, over which are angels, stern and severe, who do not disobey God in what He commands of them and who do what they are commanded.
\end{itemize}

\begin{itemize}
\item [6] \textit{Shield yourselves and your families} by being obedient and reverent and enjoining obedience and reverence to God (T). This is the only verse in which believers are told to shield themselves from the Fire; in other verses it is the believers who call upon God to shield them \textit{from the punishment of the Fire} (see 3:16, 191; 40:7). Here stones likely refers to the idols worshipped by the idolaters, as they were made of stone (JJ) or were in fact stones. The angels referred to here are the guardians of Hell, of whom the Quran says there are nineteen (74:30).
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\begin{itemize}
\item [7] O you who disbelieve! Make no excuses this day! You are only requited for that which you used to do.
\end{itemize}

\begin{itemize}
\item [7] This verse is a direct address to the disbelievers as they enter the Fire (JJ) \textit{This day} thus refers to the Day of Resurrection (T). \textit{You are only requited for that which you used to do} (cf. 52:16) indicates that God is just in punishing souls and wrongs no one, as in 45:22: \textit{God created the heavens and the earth in truth, and so that every soul may be recompensed for that which it has earned; and they shall not be wronged} (see also 27:90; 34:33; 37:39; 83:36). When people see the
reality of their deeds on the Day of Resurrection, it is said that they will know the truth and thus not try to make any excuses for their actions, as in 67:10–11.

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8 O you who believe! Repent unto God with sincere repentance. It may be that your Lord will absolve you of your evil deeds and cause you to enter Gardens with rivers running below—the Day when God will not disgrace the Prophet and those who believe with him, with their light spreading before them and on their right, while they say, “Our Lord, complete our light for us and forgive us. Truly Thou art Powerful over all things.”

8 Repent unto God can also mean “turn unto God,” indicating turning from sin to obedience to God (Ṭ). Sincere repentance indicates that it is not a mere turning away from sin, but turning with true contrition, so that one never returns to the sin of which one has repented (Ṭ) and resolves not to commit the sin again. It may be translates ʿasā, which conveys a sense of hope. In line with this verse, a ḥadīth says, “O people! Repent unto your Lord before you die, and draw yourselves nigh unto Him with righteous deeds before you become preoccupied”; also see 3:193. That God will absolve human beings of their evil deeds is asserted in several verses. In some, as here, such absolution is linked to reverence for God (8:29; 5:65; 65:5); in others it is linked to faith and belief (29:7; 47:2; 48:5; 64:9). In 4:31 absolution from evil deeds is said to be the reward for repenting and then shunning major sins, while in other verses such absolution is linked with specific deeds, such as performing charitable acts in secret (2:271), fighting or being slain in the way of God (3:195), or performing prayer and giving alms (zakāh; 5:12). In general such absolution indicates the manner in which God shields those of faith from the evil consequences of their own actions in both this life and the Hereafter (see 40:9, 45; 42:25): God may absolve them of the worst of that which they have done and render unto them their reward for the best of that which they used to do (39:35; see also 9:121; 16:96; 24:38; 29:7; 46:16). Such absolution is thus linked with God’s admitting people into Gardens with rivers running below, see 2:25c; 3:195; 5:12; 48:5; 64:9.

Regarding their light spreading before them and on their right, see 57:12c. The supplication at the end of the verse is understood as the words uttered by the believers when they see God extinguish the light of the hypocrites (Q, R); see
commentary on 57:13–14. According to al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, God completes their light for them, but they continue to call upon God, seeking to draw nearer unto Him (R).

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9 O Prophet! Strive against the disbelievers and the hypocrites, and be harsh with them. Their refuge is Hell. What an evil journey’s end!

9 This verse is identical to 9:73. In this context, strive against the disbelievers is understood to mean with the sword as well as through preaching and calling them to God (Q), while strive against . . . the hypocrites is understood to mean by applying the legal punishments for their transgressions (Q, T).

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10 God sets forth as an example for those who disbelieve the wife of Noah and the wife of Lot. They were under two of Our righteous servants; then they betrayed them, and they availed them naught against God. And it was said unto both, “Enter the Fire with those who enter.”

10–12 These last three verses speak to the situation of the Prophet’s wives by providing examples of disbelievers from among the wives of previous prophets and examples of the most pious women in the history of the Judeo-Christian-Islamic tradition. They also provide an example for all believers by demonstrating that the righteousness of another does not benefit one who works corruption and the corruption of another does not harm one who is righteous (R).

10 They betrayed them; that is, they both betrayed their husbands. Lot’s wife’s betrayal of him is alluded to in several verses (7:83; 11:81; 15:60; 27:57; 29:32), but this is the only explicit Quranic reference to Noah’s wife’s betrayal. Their lives are an example because they demonstrate that marriage to a prophet did not assure salvation; and in the case of Lot’s wife it did not protect her from being punished with the other disbelievers when Sodom was destroyed (see 7:83; 11:81; 15:59–60; 26:170–71; 27:57; 29:32; 54:34; cf. Genesis 19:26). Noah’s wife is reported to have said to the people that he was a madman (JJ, R), while Lot’s wife
is reported to have told the people the whereabouts of Lot’s guests, whom they sought to molest (JJ, R).

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11 And God sets forth as an example for those who believe the wife of Pharaoh when she said, “My Lord, build for me a house near unto Thee in the Garden, deliver me from Pharaoh and his deeds, and deliver me from the wrongdoing people,”

11 In contrast to the wives of Noah and Lot, who were sinners despite being married to righteous men, Pharaoh’s wife Āsiyah was righteous despite being married to the greatest of sinners. Āsiyah is said to be one of four women who were pure of sin regarding whom the Prophet is reported to have said, “The best among the women of the Garden are Khadījah bint Khuwaylid, Fāżimah bint Muhammad, Maryam bint ʿImrān, and Āsiyah bint Muzāhim, the wife of Pharaoh” (IK). According to commentators, Āsiyah was tortured by Pharaoh for believing in Moses, at which time she uttered the words attributed to her in this verse and was taken to Paradise (IK, JJ, R). The Prophet is also reported to have said, “Verily I the Garden God has married me to Mary bint ʿImrān, the wife of Pharaoh, and the sister of Moses” (Āl).

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12 and Mary, the daughter of ʿImrān, who preserved her chastity. Then We breathed therein of Our Spirit, and she confirmed the Words of her Lord and His Books; and she was among the devoutly obedient.

12 And Mary follows upon the wife of Pharaoh from v. 11, meaning that she is also set forth as an example for those who believe (Āl). For the story of Jesus’ mother, Mary, see Sūrah 19. ʿImrān is the name of Mary’s father, who is not named in the Bible but is known in extra-Biblical literature as Joachim (see commentary on 3:33–35). She preserved her chastity (cf. 21:91) is in part a response to the accusations of being unchaste that Mary’s people made against her (R); see 19:27–28. Some read Our Spirit here and in 21:91 as a reference to the Angel
Gabriel (IK, JJ,Ṭ), while others say Our Spirit refers to a spirit among the spirits God has created, which would here be the spirit of Jesus (Q; for the debates regarding this issue, see 4:171c). Taken most literally, it would refer to the Spirit of God. That she confirmed the Words of her Lord and His Books means that she believed in all previous revelations (R). Regarding devoutly obedient, see 66:5c; 4:34c. Here the last phrase could also mean “she was from the devoutly obedient,” thus indicating purity of lineage (Āl).