

Isaiah 1-12; 28-33 (First Isaiah) + 36-39 // 2 Kings 18-20

Isaiah of Jerusalem was born around 765 B.C. and his ministry extended some 40 years; from his first calling the year of the death of King Uzziah (740; Isaiah 6:1) until the frustrated invasions of Sennacherib and the Babylonian ambassadors (701-700; Isaiah 36-39). He was a person of acknowledged authority and influence in the royal court and perhaps belonged to Jerusalem's aristocracy (DHHBE, Introduction), since he could easily present himself before the kings (7:3-17; 39:3; 37:2), and he actively participated in the affairs of the kingdom (→ 37:5-7) and had connections with some priests and high functionaries in Jerusalem (8:2). In all these political interventions, Isaiah is the prophet of faith – only an unbreakable trust in Yahweh, and not in the alliances with foreign nations, could bring liberation to Israel (7:8-9; 30:1-5; see 40:27-31). The events that marked his ministry include (→ chronological synopsis):

- the Syria-Ephraim war (735-34; Isa 7:1-2)
- the disappearance of the kingdom of Israel (722/21; 2 Kings 17:3-6), and
- the siege of Jerusalem by the Assyrian king Sennacherib (701; Isa 36-37).

As did his precursors in the 8th century (Amos, Hosea and Micah), Isaiah condemned the elite (judges, elders, etc.) as murderers, violent, oppressors, etc. (Is 1:21, 23, 26; 3:13-14; 28:14), but never attacked the monarchy in the same manner. Rather, Isaiah sympathized and collaborated with Ahaz and Hezekiah and many thought that the good king Hezekiah (Ahaz' son) was the original inspiration for the oracles of the pregnant woman (Isa 7), the birth of the Wonderful Son (Isa 9) and the peaceful kingdom (Isa 11). Although he did not attack the monarchy directly as his predecessors had done, Isaiah continually denounced the state cult (Am 5:21-24 → Isa 1:10-17; see Hos 4:6; Mic 6:6-8). See Amos 4:5 → Isa 29:13 concerning the popular enthusiasm for this cult. The contrast between a purely liturgical religiosity and the practice of solidarity with the oppressed and liberating justice is also reflected in the New Testament (→ Mat 25:31-46; → Jas 1:26-27). Furthermore, Isaiah follows Amos in the developing of denunciations of the elite classes: the manipulation and corruption of the judicial system and the acceptance of bribes, and the formation of the large estate (Am 2:7-8; 5:10-11; 6:1-7; 7:1 → Isa 1:23; 33-15; 5:8-13, 23; 10:1-2; 33:15; see Mic 2:2, 8-9). Thus, the threats that Amos directed against Samaria and the North, Isaiah applied to Judah.

The oracles that came from Isaiah of Jerusalem are preserved mainly in 1-12 and 28-33. The book's other divisions (13-23, → oracles against the nations; 24-27, the "Little Apocalypse; 34-35 and 40-55 → Second Isaiah; 56-66 → Third Isaiah; 36-39 → Deuteronomist history) include fragments and elements of his teachings, but were mainly written by later disciples → outline. In spite of the great diversity of historical contexts, styles and theologies (with Second Isaiah in the Babylonian exile, 586-538 and Third Isaiah under Persia and post-exile, 538-333), Isaiah's school which transmitted the book to us, revealed stylistic and theological continuities. For example, the description of Yahweh as "the Holy One of Israel" is an element that runs throughout First, Second and Third Isaiah, a description probably received from Hosea (11:9; 12:1 → Isaiah 1:4; 5:19, 24; 10:20 etc.).

Isaiah 1:1 – Table/Chronological Synopsis (see DHHBE 1956-61; BJ 1847-68)

1 Uzziah/Ozziah/Azariah (781-740 B.C.)

750ss. **Amos**, then **Hosea**

740 6:1 **Isaiah's** calling: "In the year that King Uzziah died"

2 Jothan/Jotham (740-736): the beginnings of Micah

3 Ahaz (736-717/16)

735-34 the Syria-Ephraim war: Israel and Syria lay siege to Jerusalem
7:1-16 "The young woman...will bear a son..."

722/21 The fall of Samaria, deportations, end of the northern kingdom

Hezekiah (716-687), the good king; the promised son of the "young woman" (7:14)?

701 Sennacherib of Assyria invades Judah, Hezekiah pays him tribute (7:17)
see Isa 36-37 // 2 Kings 18:13-19:37 // 2 Chr 32:1-23

612 Nineveh destroyed: Assyria conquered by Babylonia → 605 Battle of Carchemish

598 First conquest of Jerusalem by Babylon (Nebuchadnezzar)
Ezekiel and Daniel deported

587/86 Jerusalem falls, deportation to Babylon (**545-540, 2d Isaiah 40-55**)

539 Cyrus of Persia conquers Babylon

538 Cyrus' edict, end of the exile

520-515 Construction of the (Second) Temple (**500-450, Third Isaiah 56-66**)

458 Ezra and the Torah of Moses

444 Nehemiah reconstructs the walls of Jerusalem

333 Alexander the Great of Greece conquers Persia

175-163 Antioch IV Epiphany; 166-142 War of the Maccabees; 165 Daniel

63 B.C. Pompey, Roman general, conquers Jerusalem

Outline of (First) Isaiah: 1-12; 28-33 (+36-39 see // 2 Kings 18-20)

1:1 First title (see 2:1)

1:2-6:13 Messages about Jerusalem and Judah

- 1:2-31 Judah, rebellious nation (Second title, 2:1)
- 2:1-5 The mountain of the Lord's house // Micah 4:1-5
- 6-22 The day of the Lord is near
- 3:1-15 The punishment of Judah and Jerusalem
- 16-4:1 The indictment of the women of Jerusalem
- 4:2-6 The promise of blessings to come
- 5:1-7 The song of the vineyard (image of Judah)
- 8-30 Six curses ("Woes") against the oppressors → 10:1-4 the Seventh Woe 6:1-13
- Isaiah's calling/commission/mission: "Holy, holy, holy..."

7:1-12:6 The Book of Immanuel

- 7:1-9 First message from Isaiah to king Ahaz
- 7:10-25 Second message to king Ahaz: "The young woman...shall bear a son...Immanuel"**
- 8:1-10 Assyria, the Lord's instrument
- 11-15 The Lord is the one to be feared (not Assyria)
- 16-22 Isaiah's warning to his disciples
- 9:1-7 Birth and kingdom of the Prince of Peace**
- 8-10:4 Four messages of judgment
- 10:5-19 God makes use of Assyria, "rod of my anger", to punish
- 20-27 Promises of freedom for those remaining in Israel
- 27d-34 The Assyrian's advance: the reckoning of invalid cities
- 11:1-10 The root of Jesse and his kingdom of peace and justice.**
- 11-16 The triumphant return of the Israelites exiled during the Diaspora.
- 12:1-6 Canticle of giving thanks for the liberation

13;1-23:18 → Oracles against/about the foreign nations

24:1-27:13 → Isaiah's Apocalypse

28:1-33:24 Diverse poems about Israel and Judah

- 28:1-6 Warning to Samaria
- 7-29:16 Warnings and promises to Jerusalem
- 29:17-24 Promise of liberation to Israel
- 30:1-26 Against those that seek support from Egypt
- 27-33 Assyria's punishment
- 32:1-8 Coming of the just king
- 9-14 Against frivolous women
- 15-20 Renewal of creation and society
- 33:1-24 Anguish and promises of liberation

1 The Poor. Instead of using general terms for the poor, the first chapter of Isaiah specifically speaks of widows and orphans (1:17, 23; see 9:17; 10:2) and is one of the

strongest and most revealing texts concerning the poor and the options in their favor that Yahweh demands of his nation. The use of the metaphors of Sodom and Gomorrah to denounce the governors and people of Jerusalem make clear that Isaiah, like → Ezekiel 16, interprets the sin of Sodom as an example of violence (the attempt to violate the two visiting angels) and not of homosexuality.

- 10 Hear the word of the Lord, you rulers of Sodom!
Listen to the teaching of our God, you people of Gomorrah!
- 15 When you stretch out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you;
even though you make many prayers, I will not listen;
your hands are full of blood.
- 16 Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean;
remove the evil of your doings from before my eyes.
- 17 Learn to be good; seek justice (*mishpat*), rescued the oppressed,
defend (*shafat*) the orphan, plead for the widow.
- 18 Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be like snow
Though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool.
- 22 How the faithful city has become a whore! She that was full of justice,
righteousness lodged in her –
but now murderers!
- 23 You princes are rebels, and companions of thieves.
Everyone loves a bribe and runs after gifts.
They do not defend (*shafat*) the orphan,
And the widow's cause does not come before them...
- 27 Zion shall be redeemed by justice,
and those in her who repent, by *righteousness (tsedeqah)* (1:10-27).

Violence is expressed in the references to “hands...full of blood” (1:15), to sins like scarlet and crimson (1:18), and to “murderers” (1:21). The causes of the poverty of the widows and orphans, not to mention the death of the father-protector, were the (il)legal tactics used to strip them of their inheritance, a classic mechanism of *oppression (khamots, 1:17* – the bribing of false witnesses), which in practice left them without a means of subsistence and killed them. In the face of such injustice, oppression and violence, “justice” is understood as righteousness which endeavors to assure the poor their rights and their properties (17, 21, 23, and 27). To manifest such justice was to demonstrate the community's faithfulness to their covenant with God:

- 26 And I will restore your judges as at the first,
and your counselors as at the beginning.
Afterward you shall be called the city of righteousness,
the faithful city (see 1:21).

Thus, for Isaiah, as for the other prophets of the Eighth Century (→ Amos, Micah, Hosea), the condemned sin was that of oppression and violence against the poor, and justice was righteousness (see the paradigm of the → Exodus and Second Isaiah).

In other texts, Isaiah uses an explicit vocabulary which denounces the oppression of the poor:

- 14 The Lord enters into judgment with the elders and princes of his people:
It is you who have devoured the vineyard;
The spoil of the poor (*'ani*) is in your houses.
- 15 What do you mean by crushing (*daka'*) my people,
by grinding the face of the poor? says the Lord God of hosts (3:14-15)..

Reflecting the typical two class society (without a middle class), the prophet condemns the rich and powerful (“elders and princes”) for having “crushed my people” in general, those that are the poor-oppressed. In the same chapter, Isaiah twice refers to the oppression (*nagash*; 3:5, 12) of the people.

The denunciation of the governors in **10:1-2** is similar:

- 1 Ah you who make iniquitous decree,
who write oppressive (*'amal*) statutes,
- 2 to turn aside the needy (*dallim*) from justice (*mishpat*)
and to rob the poor (*'aniyyim*) of my people of their right,
that widows may be your spoil
and that you may make the orphans your prey!

The governors' mechanisms of oppression stripped the poor, the widows and the orphans of their property. In deciphering the song of the vineyard (5:1-7), Isaiah makes it clear that the sin being denounced is the oppression and the violence that kills the poor and the weak and allows only the rich to live:

- 7 For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts
is the house of Israel, and the people of Judah are his pleasant planting;
He expected justice (*mishpat*), but saw bloodshed;
Righteousness (*tsedeqah*), but heard a cry.
- 8 Ah you who join house to house,
who add field to field,
until there is room for no one but you,
and you are left to live alone in the midst of the land! (**5:7-8; see 33:15**)

Thus, following → Amos (2:7-8; 5:10), Isaiah denounces the manipulation and corruption of the judicial system for accepting bribes, the mechanism commonly used for appropriating peasant lands. In this way, the rich and the powerful created their grand estates, which they could exploit, as absent owners, living in Samaria and Jerusalem (Am 5:11; 7:1; Mic 2:2). Which is to say, the denunciations and threats that Amos directed toward Samaria and the north Isaiah now applies to Judah and Jerusalem in the south (Isa 1:23; 5:23; 10:1-2; 33:15).¹ Such elite generally collaborated with the dominant empires, such as Assyria in the Eighth Century.

In announcing the birth of a royal child (8:21-9:7), Isaiah clearly establishes the context of violence and oppression on Assyria's part, and the resulting poverty. However, the birth of the royal child (not the second coming of the Messiah) signaled the end of all oppression and violence and the resulting poverty ("hunger" in 8:21-22)².

9:4 For the yoke of their burden [*sobel*],
and the bar across their shoulders,
the rod of their oppressor,
you have broken as on the day of Midian.
6 For a child has been born for us, a son given to us;
authority rests upon his shoulders;
and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

In the messianic realm, violence is eradicated, not only between human beings, but also between animals (11:19):

4 but with righteousness (*tsedeq*) he shall judge the poor (*dallim*),
and decide with equity for the meek of the earth...
5 Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist,
and faithfulness the belt around his loins.
7 The cow and the bear shall graze,
their young shall lie down together;
and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.
9 They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain;
for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD
as the waters cover the sea.

For some modern thinkers, the food chain shows that God does not exist, since they do not believe that a personal, good and all powerful God would create a world where so many animals make others to suffer. However, according to Isaiah, such phenomena do not reflect the Creator's final purpose – which even includes “vegetarian” lions. Paul also interpreted the Law as a prohibition of all that “does wrong to a neighbor” (→ Romans 13:8-10) – which means, the “sin” consists in that which makes a viable community life impossible (see the Ten Commandments).

2 Women (+ = 5 positive texts; - = 5 negative texts).

+1:17, 23 widows (cf. 9:17; 10:2; see above, under 1 The Poor).
-1:21-23 woman Jerusalem. Zion=whore (see 3:25-26, cited below).

1:21 How the faithful city has become a whore!
She that was full of justice,
righteousness lodged in her
-- but now murderers!

Although Jerusalem/Zion is personified as a woman in all of Isaiah, in First Isaiah it is a negative image, a prostitute punished for her injustices, while in → Second Isaiah it is always a positive image of the city as Yahweh's beloved wife (in Third Isaiah all the texts are positive with the exception of 57:3-13).³

-3:12 Women and youths oppress/govern Israel

My people--children are their oppressors,
and women rule over them.
O my people, your leaders mislead you,
and confuse the course of your paths.

Some interpret this more literally as a reference to the young king Ahaz (743-727 B.C.), dominated by women of the court (BJ note; see Athalia, Jezebel). However, for the reference to anarchy and the upsetting of order (3:4-7), it is better to interpret (children) and (women) as insults that suggest that the leaders are weak ("sissies, effeminate") or frivolous (like the women in 3:16-4:1) and capricious (lacking wisdom) like children. The rhetorical efficacy of this type of insult depends on the patriarchal prejudices which suppose that women are weak (1 Peter 3:7; see the insult, "Look at your troops: they are women in your midst," Nahum 3:13).

-Isa 3:16-4:1. Following the tradition of → Amos (4:1-3), Isaiah powerfully denounces the wives of the elite class in Jerusalem, so that many feminist interpreters consider the prophet to be misogynist.⁴

3:16 The LORD said: Because the daughters of Zion are haughty
and walk with outstretched necks,
glancing wantonly with their eyes,
mincing along as they go, tinkling with their feet;
17 the Lord will afflict with scabs the heads of the daughters of Zion,
and the LORD will lay bare their secret parts.
18 In that day the Lord will take away the finery
of the anklets, the headbands, and the crescents; ¹⁹the pendants, the bracelets,
and the scarves; 20 the headdresses, the armlets, the sashes, the perfume
boxes, and the amulets; 21 the signet rings and nose rings; 22 the festal
robes, the mantles, the cloaks, and the handbags; 23 the garments of gauze,
the linen garments, the turbans, and the veils.
24 Instead of perfume there will be a stench;
and instead of a sash, a rope;
and instead of well-set hair, baldness;
and instead of a rich robe, a binding of sackcloth;
instead of beauty, shame.

25 Your men shall fall by the sword

and your warriors in battle.
26 And her gates shall lament and mourn;
ravaged, she shall sit upon the ground.

4:1 Seven women shall take hold
of one man in that day, saying,
"We will eat our own bread and wear our own clothes;
just let us be called by your name;
take away our disgrace." (**Isa 3:16-4:1**).

As Amos had denounced the women of Samaria ("cows of Bashan"; 4:1-3), Isaiah denounced the women of Zion (3:16-17, 24) and Zion as a woman (3:25-26), with a previous list of condemned luxurious adornments (18:23). The prophetess (8:1-4), mother of Isaiah's second son (at least), would have had to dress herself very humbly to avoid being a target of the condemnation. For Isaiah polygamy was not sinful, but for the women in this text it was obviously not the best option → Exodus; Deuteronomy).

-4:4 The denunciation of the women of Jerusalem follows very close in 3:16-4:1 and some commentators understand the text as an intentional continuation⁵, an interpretation that for others implies that both texts are misogynist:

4:4 once the Lord has washed away the *filth (tso'a)* of the daughters of Zion
and cleansed the bloodstains of Jerusalem from its midst
by a spirit of judgment (*mishpat*) and by a spirit of burning.

The LXX makes the text more inclusive, just and "politically correct" by adding "sons": "the filth of the sons and daughters...". Joseph Blenkinsopp⁶ takes the reference to blood as that of a woman whose menstruation makes her filthy (→ Lev 12:1-2; 15:19-30) and interprets it as a type of that which makes all human beings foul (males as well as females). John Oswalt interprets "the daughters of Zion" as an image for all its inhabitants.⁷

Later, Isaiah returns to address the lazy/complacent women of Jerusalem (**-32:9-14**), but in a controversial context that speaks of the righteous kingdom of a king (messianic?) and its princes (32:1-8), and of a pouring out of the spirit that will produce liberty, justice, peace and ecological transformation (32:15-20). In this context, it is difficult to understand why the prophet suddenly addresses the frivolous women of Jerusalem and with such severity.⁸

32:9 Rise up, you women who are at ease, hear my voice;
you complacent daughters, listen to my speech.
10 In little more than a year you will shudder, you complacent ones;
for the vintage will fail, the fruit harvest will not come.
11 Tremble, you women who are at ease, shudder,
you complacent ones;
strip, and make yourselves bare,
and put sackcloth on your loins.
12 Beat your breasts
for the pleasant fields,
for the fruitful vine,

13 for the soil of my people
 growing up in thorns and briers;
 yes, for all the joyous houses
 in the jubilant city.
 14 For the palace will be forsaken,
 the populous city deserted;
 the hill and the watchtower
 will become dens forever,
 the joy of wild asses,
 a pasture for flocks;
 15 until a spirit from on high
 is poured out on us...

The order of the themes in the chapter (1-8, just government; 9-14, indifferent women; 15-20, pouring out of the transforming Spirit) almost suggests that the women are the most guilty for the problems of the epoch and that the spiritual transformation of society and of creation depends on the repentance of the frivolous women of Zion.

Without a doubt, the most famous woman in Isaiah is **the young woman/virgin (+7:14)**, an anonymous maiden in Isaiah, but explicitly a virgin in the LXX, cited in Mat 1:23 in reference to Mary and the birth of Jesus. In the original context, Isaiah says to king Ahaz and his court:

Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel.

According to the messianic rereading of the LXX, Matthew 1:23 and the Christian tradition, Isaiah 7:14 prophesies the virginal conception of the Messiah: Isaiah 9:6-7, then, celebrates his birth and 11:1-10 prophesies his kingdom of peace. If the young woman were virgin, she would be a sexual minority and the son would be considered as illegal as a bastard, prohibited from entering the assembly of Israel (Deut 23:2; John 8:41). Surprisingly, the BJ (notes) defends a messianic interpretation which supposes that, in the last analysis, Isaiah is referring to Mary, the mother of Jesus. More common today is the interpretation of DHHBE (see notes), which take the reference to the young woman as an allusion to the wife of Ahaz. Then, the child would be King Hezekiah, a pious reformer whose just reign comes before the messianic reign, just and peaceful (Isa 7:14; 9:1-6; 11:1-9). Another common modern interpretation suggests that the young woman is the prophetess (8:1-4) and that Isaiah is the father of the promised son.⁹ In the original context, *the* young woman (with the article, RV, NVI, and DHH contrary to BJ) must be someone Ahaz knows, in order that the birth function as the offered sign. We should understand the interpretation of LXX (“a virgin”) and the citing in Matthew (referring to Mary and the birth of Jesus) as suitable rereadings, but not as scientific exegeses of the original meaning; cf. → 2 Cor. 9:9-10 with Deut. 25:4. The reference in LXX does not contradict Isaiah 7:14 in the Hebrew, but precisely states that the expectant young woman is a virgin, thus preparing the way for Matthew 1:23, which sees in the virginal birth of Jesus a suitable rereading, a decisive fulfillment of the prophecy. Since women like the wife of Ahaz and the prophetess with Isaiah were continually pregnant, perhaps Isaiah left the meaning

ambiguous on purpose. Because of Ahaz's incredulity (Isa 7:12-13), the sign remained very obscure.

+Isa 8:1-4 Isaiah and the Prophetess (anonymous). With the exception of → Hosea (and his prostitute wife), Isaiah is the only prophet in the Bible who is seen to have children (see the four daughters of Philip the evangelist, *virgins* that prophesied in Acts 21:9). The commentaries take it for granted that the prophetess whom Isaiah "entered" in order to beget a son was the prophet's wife, and even suggest that "prophetess" was rather a title of honor, and not of profession (as the "queen" wife of a king¹⁰). Still, the text never affirms that the "prophetess" was the prophet's wife (8:1-4)¹¹. It is commonly supposed that the prophetess was also the mother of Isaiah's first child (7:3), but it seems strange that 7:3 speaks of this child without referring to the prophetess as his mother. Between the reference to the first child (7:3; without a mother) and to the second (8:1-4), the "young woman" of Isaiah 7:14 appears, also anonymous and of dubious identity. Later, in Isaiah's text, there appear only the two sons, as signs of the God's imminent judgment – the prophetess brings forth the second son then disappears (8:18).

Like Jesus, Isaiah enjoyed a close circle of "disciples" (Isa 8:16) but the book never speaks of wife, home or family. It almost gives the impression of the bisexual, common in antiquity, who uses a woman to comply with his responsibility to procreate children, but otherwise enjoys a circle of friends and disciples (which could have included the "prophetess" and other women). Isaiah is the only prophet who explicitly speaks of his disciples – although it is common to suppose that persons such as "the prophets' sons" (Elijah) were common in other cases (for modern scholars this explains many elements in the editing of the books). On the other hand, prophetesses were not common in Israel – other than the anonymous mother of Isaiah's sons, there are only four: Miriam/Mary (Ex 15:20-21); Deborah (Judges 4:4), Huldah (2 Kings 22:14-20); Noadiah (Neh 6:14) → Joel 2:28-32; in the New Testament → Acts 2:16-21; 21:9; 1 Corinthians 11:2-16; 12:1-14:40). As such, Isaiah and the prophetess-mother rather give the impression of belonging to a circle of shamans, holy people of the spirit, mostly unmarried, and that usually didn't form traditional families. If Isaiah were this type of shaman, along with → Ezekiel, who was left a widower, and → Hosea, married to a prostitute (sacred?), the picture of the canonic prophets would be complete – all would be sexual minorities of some type (see Elijah and Elisha; in the New Testament: John the Baptist, Jesus with his mostly unmarried disciples, and Paul with his colleagues also mostly unmarried).

10:30 daughter Galim "Bat-Galim" DHH, city close to Jerusalem¹²
3 Sexual minorities.

1:9-10; 3:9; 13:19 Sodom and Gomorrah.

1:9 If the Lord of Hosts had not left us a few survivors,
We would have been like Sodom and become like Gomorrah.

10 Hear the word of the Lord, you rulers of Sodom!
Listen to the teaching of our God, you people of Gomorrah!

The description of the devastation of the earth (1:7-8) refers to the invasion of Senaquerib, king of Assyria (701 B.C.; 2 Kings 8:13-16 // 2 Chr 32:1-23; Isa 36; see DHHBE note 1:7)¹³. Isaiah 1:9 literally refers to the historic cities of Sodom and Gomorrah (cited in Romans 9:29), but Isaiah 1:10 is speaking to the rulers of Jerusalem and the notion of Judah, insulting them in metaphorically calling them “Sodom” and “Gomorrah”. As John Sawyer¹⁴ and Jose Miranda¹⁵ point out, the references to Sodom and Gomorrah (Isa 1:9-10) have already been interpreted in terms of injustice, oppression and violence (1:15-17) instead of in sexual terms. Blenkinsopp points out that Isaiah does not condemn Sodom and Gomorrah for any sexual sins, but rather for the violence and the lack of justice in favor of the oppressed: “For emphasis on homosexual conduct we have to wait until the Hellenistic period”¹⁶ – meaning, non-canonic literature written between 333-64 B.C., since → Daniel, the only canonical book written in the Hellenistic epoch, also did not condemn this conduct. → Ezekiel 16:49-50 follows Isaiah, but the reference to the “abomination” is also absent in Isaiah. Thus the references to Sodom and Gomorrah in Isaiah reflect the unanimous use of the Hebrew Bible, where the cities are examples of divine judgment against the injustices and oppression of the weak and the poor. The texts never explicitly refer to any sexual sins, much less to homosexual acts. Any allusion to sexual sin would only be as an example of violence, violation or sexual oppression (also in Isa 3:9; 13:9).

7:14 the young woman, not necessarily virgin (see under Women, above).

7:20 The king of Assyria as a razor hired to Yahweh:

On that day the Lord will shave with a razor hired beyond the River – with the king of Assyria – the head and the hair of the feet, and will take off the beard as well.

Instead of “pubic hair” the Hebrew refers literally to the “hair of the feet”, since frequently “feet” is a euphemism for genitals (Ex 4:25; Isa 6:2; NVI not; see DHHBE note 6:2e: “*feet*...a discreet way of referring to the genital organs”; BJ note 6:2c)¹⁷. As in Isaiah 10:5-19, Assyria is the instrument God uses to punish his own people. In this case, the men (with beards) are reduced to the inferior status of women (without beards) – (see the shameful experience of the men whom Daniel delegated to Ammon; 2 Sam 10:1-5). Such texts reflect patriarchal concepts of the superior male honor, but in Isaiah 7:20 God does not seem to be preoccupied in maintaining such cultural traditions of sex and gender.

Isa 8:1-4 Isaiah and the prophetess (unnamed). See above, under women.

20:1-6 Isaiah remains naked for three years [*arom*] → Mark 14:51-52:

20:1 In the year that the commander-in-chief, who was sent by King Sargon of Assyria, came to Ashdod and fought against it and took it—2 at that time the LORD had spoken to Isaiah son of Amoz, saying, "Go, and loose the sackcloth from your loins and take your sandals off your feet," and he did so, walking naked and barefoot. 3 Then the LORD said, "Just as my servant Isaiah has walked naked and barefoot for three years as a sign and a portent against Egypt and Ethiopia, 4 so shall the king of Assyria lead away the Egyptians as captives and the Ethiopians as exiles, both the young and the old, naked and barefoot, with buttocks uncovered, to the shame of Egypt. 5 And they shall be dismayed and confounded because of Ethiopia their hope and of Egypt their boast (see DHHBE notes 20:1-6; → Micah 1:8).

If Isaiah went completely naked (BJ) or with a loincloth, as prisoners of war used to do (DHHBE note 20:2), in order to give more force to his message, the prophet shockingly broke the norms of society (like a woman who would go about in a bikini amongst the Taliban). Even though → Jeremiah (probably gay) used many symbolic actions, the only one that Isaiah employed (supposedly married to a prophetess) was to walk about in the nude for three years, as prisoners of war did. It is not a good example to support common “family values” – he seems more like the shamans, who generally do not marry.

39:7 Isaiah to king Hezekiah, concerning eunuchs:

7 Some of your own sons who are born to you shall be taken away; they shall be **eunuchs** (*sarisim*) in the palace of the king of Babylon."

After being taken captive in war after the fall of Jerusalem (587/6 B.C.), many Israelite males were castrated, precisely as → First Isaiah had prophesied (39:7 // 2 Kings 20:18 → Daniel; Nehemiah). There had been eunuchs in other courts, including Jerusalem¹⁸ (2 Kings 24:12, 15; see the canonic formation and → Third Isaiah as eunuch, Isa 56:3-5).

Conclusion: Isaiah and sexual minorities. Traditionally, commentators have presented Isaiah as married and with two children, a prophet who exemplifies and upholds the traditional morality and family (patriarchal) values. Even feminist studies suggest that the “prophetess” was nothing more than the prophet’s spouse, a good mother and housewife without her own ministry. However, when we consider the whole picture, Isaiah and the prophetess appear to be very “different” from the traditional picture. Therefore, if Third Isaiah was a eunuch, and Second Isaiah was gay, we could qualify the First Isaiah as “queer” (having engendered sons doesn’t make him exclusively homosexual, but perhaps bisexual and certainly very strange, a sexual minority that subverts social norms):

- Although Second Isaiah appears to be so “feminist” that some have thought he was a woman, First Isaiah has so many *negative* texts concerning women (3:16-4:1; 32:9-14) that many suggest he was “misogynist” (→ Ecclesiastes).
- As in → Ezekiel 16, Isaiah interprets the tradition of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah as a judgment of violence and oppression, not of “homosexuality” (1:9-10; 3:9; 13:9; never in another part of the book).
- While the “gay” prophet, Jeremiah, employed several signs to emphasize his message, Isaiah used only one: parading naked for three years (20:1-6).
- He attributed to Yahweh the intention to use the king of Assyria as a razor (7:20) to reduce the men of Israel to the inferior status of women (beardless/hairless).
- He prophesied that the descendents of Hezekiah would be made eunuchs in the exile (39:7) → Third Isaiah, Daniel, Nehemiah, Matthew 19:11-12; Acts 8; Rev 14:4.

- He had three sons, at least one with the prophetess, who was perhaps his wife (8:1-4; cf. 7:3).
- He referred to a young pregnant woman as a sign to king Ahaz, perhaps even a virgin and/or not married.

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(* these defend the tradition of Isaiah as the author of the entire book)

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The influence of Amos on Isaiah:

Am 5:21-24 → Isa 1:10-17 the criticism/denunciation of the state cult; cf. Am 4:5 → Isa 29:13 concerning the popular enthusiasm for the cult

Am 4:1-3 → Isa 3:16-4:1 the denunciation of the elite and their spouses

Am 6:1-7 → Isa 5:8-13 the exploitation of the poor, the needy, the disinherited, widows, orphans and other marginalized people

Am 2:7-8; 5:10 → Isa 1:23; 5:23; 10:1-2; 33:15 the manipulation and corruption of the judicial system and the acceptance of bribes, the formation of large estates (Am 5:11; 7:1; Mic 2:2). Thus, the warnings that Amos directed against Samaria and the north, Isaiah applied to Judah.

Hosea concerning unfaithful sons, the whore city and Israel as a vineyard (10:1, etc.) → Isa 1:2-3; 1:21-26; 5:1-7.

Hos 11:9; 12:1 → Isa 1:4; 5:24 the Saint of Israel

Mic 4:1-5 // Isa 2:2-5 variants

Mic 4:1-5 // Isa 2:2-5 variants

Mic 6:6-8 critique of the cult and of the state → Isa 1

Mic 1:8 naked → Isa 20:1-6

Mic 2:8-9 → Isa 3:13-15, oppression and violence against the poor

End Notes

1. Blenkinsopp 2000:105-111
2. Hanks 1982:29-30
3. Susan Ackerman WS 2000:544-45
4. Susan Ackerman 1992/98:171
5. John Watts 1985:48, following H. Wildberger 1991
6. Joseph Blenkinsopp 2000:204
7. John Oswalt 1986:148, citing 3:16-17
8. Brevard Childs 2001:234-242
9. Blenkinsopp 2000:233, 238-39
10. Susan Ackerman 1992/98:172-173
11. Joseph Blenkinsopp 2000:236-239
12. WS 2000:517-19
13. Joseph Blenkinsopp 2000:183
14. John Sawyer 1999:554
15. Jose Miranda 1972:122-123; 1974:96
16. Joseph Blenkinsopp 2001:184

17. Blenkinsopp 2000:235 note e
 18. Joseph Blenkinsopp 2000:487-488
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