

# Isaiah 3:16–23: Dress, pride, ostentatious items or syncretism?



## Authors:

Paul Nyarko-Mensah<sup>1</sup>   
Dirk J. Human<sup>1</sup> 

## Affiliations:

<sup>1</sup>Department of Old Testament and Hebrew Scriptures, Faculty of Theology and Religion, University of Pretoria, Pretoria, South Africa

## Corresponding author:

Paul Nyarko-Mensah,  
pnyarkomensah29@gmail.com

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The study investigated Isaiah 3:16–23 using the historical-grammatical methodology for the following reasons: to explore the author's aim in writing the passage, ascertain the socio-psychological significance of dress and outward appearance, determine whether the items listed are exclusively female dresses and examine the contribution of the women of Zion to national sin. Does the passage prohibit the use of jewellery? Isaiah rebuked the women for their pride in appearance, suggesting that their sin was a haughty spirit, expressed through their manner of walking and the use of luxurious items. The items listed include both male and female articles of dress and are not exclusively female dresses. Also, the list included items which had their origin in the cult and magic system of their Canaanite neighbours. Outward appearance can reflect one's socio-economic status, as well as religious, moral and cultural values. Dress can influence how a person is perceived by others and can also affect one's values.

**Intradisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary implications:** The study concluded that pride is an abomination to God, and the women of Zion, because of their privileged status, were expected to be separate and distinct from their neighbours by exhibiting modesty in their dress and appearance.

**Keywords:** dress; pride; luxurious items; syncretism; jewelry; ornament; socio-psychology; cult; magic system; women of Zion.

## Introduction

The first 12 chapters of the book of Isaiah may be divided into three sections. The first section comprises chapters 1–5. This section is in the form of a covenantal lawsuit. Chapter 6 forms the second section with the call of Isaiah as the main focus. The third section comprises chapters 7–12 and presents God's word of judgment and hope in the historical situation of the growing Assyrian Empire (Motyer 1999:70–72).

Chapters 1–5 differ from chapters 6–12 in the non-appearance of any historical indicators. With 6:1, we enter upon stated historical situations in which dates (6:1; 7:1) and world powers (7:1, 17; 8:4) are mentioned, but apart from the title (1:1), the first five chapters have no dates and no names except those of Israel and Judah (Motyer 1999:70–72). The first three chapters of the book of Isaiah can be summarised as a series of judgements on the people of Judah and Jerusalem while comforting the righteous among the covenant people of God. The indictment on Jerusalem and its inhabitants comes as a result of unbridled materialism, idolatry and the acceptance of pagan practices. Judah, though isolated geographically, had opened herself to foreign cultures (Van Gemeren 1989:471–514).

The article intends to use the historical-grammatical methodology to examine Isaiah 3:16–23 with the following questions: What was the author's aim in writing the passage? What is the significance of outward appearance? Does dress carry any socio-psychological significance? Do the garments have religious connotations beyond their basic purpose of providing coverage? Additionally, does the passage prohibit the use of jewellery or ostentatious dresses? The article also investigate whether the items mentioned are exclusive to women's clothing.

## Background and intent

Isaiah proclaimed his message over approximately 40 years during the reign of four different kings (Is 1:1; cf. Constable 2024:8). He was a contemporary of the prophets Amos and Hosea in the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Koch (1983:105) argues that 'Amos and Hosea proclaimed their messages in the days of King Uzziah, and according to the heading of Isaiah's book, this was also the first period of his activity'.

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Isaiah is one of the most frequently quoted Old Testament scriptures by New Testament writers, garnering significant attention from critical biblical scholars (cf. Hanna 2014:346). Before any study of this text can be worthwhile, it is important to investigate its background. Keil and Delitzsch (1996:21) opine that ‘the first prerequisite to a clear understanding and full appreciation of Isaiah’s prophecies is the knowledge of his times’. The background of the first Isaiah was the Assyrian threat, which culminated in the destruction of the Northern Kingdom of Israel and threatened the existence of the Southern Kingdom of Judah. The book of Isaiah is set in the second half of the 8th century BCE, during the Neo-Assyrian Empire’s rise to global supremacy (cf. Hill & Walton 1991:417–419; see also Oswalt 1986:28).

During Isaiah’s lifetime (739–701 BCE), Assyria was governed by a succession of weak rulers who struggled to maintain the conquests of previous emperors as a cohesive empire. This period of weakness provided Assyria’s neighbouring regions, particularly those farther away, with some respite from Assyrian expansion. Judah and Israel, like other nations in the ancient Near East (ANE), benefited from this situation. From around 810 BCE to 750 BCE, both kingdoms experienced a level of peace and prosperity not seen since the days of Solomon (Oswalt 1986:5). However, internal politics in the Northern Kingdom of Israel was turbulent and unstable, while the Southern Kingdom of Judah maintained a single monarchy for much of this time (2 Ki 15:17; 2 Chr 26:1–3).

Fifty-two years of peace, growth, development and political stability brought Judah to the zenith of its fame and glory. However, outward splendour carried within it the seeds of its own decay and destruction. Prosperity gave way to luxury, and the worship of Yahweh ossified into idolatry. It was during this final and prolonged period of Judah’s prosperity that Isaiah emerged as a prominent prophet, called to preach repentance and ultimately to declare the coming judgment of hardening, devastation and exile (Keil & Delitzsch 1996:21).

## Haughtiness of the women of Jerusalem

This section intends to glean from the passage what made the prophet indict the women as proud and as a result inviting the wrath of God. These will include the manner of walking and how they used cosmetics to falsify their looks among others.

The haughtiness of the women<sup>1</sup> of Zion is noted in the indictment of the prophet. However, the word used in its literary sense does not denote haughtiness but rather height unless the word is used in its figurative sense. The word גְבוּהוֹ is used seven times, and גָּבַהּ (root word) appears 33 times in the Masoretic Text (MT), typically meaning stature or height. In Isaiah 3:16 and Jeremiah 48:29, it is interpreted as ‘haughty’. The Septuagint agrees with this interpretation. Unless used

1. Oswalt (1986:139–143) interpreted the word בנות as ‘women’, but it can also mean ‘daughters’ (Is 4:4; 49:22; 60:4; Lm 3:51). In this context, בנות should be interpreted as ‘daughters’, with the Septuagint (LXX) using the word θυγατέρες. Levenson and Follis (1992:1103–1104; cf. Young 1965:161) argue that בנות ציון refers to the female inhabitants of Jerusalem.

figuratively, גְבוּהוֹ is consistently interpreted as ‘haughtiness’ and not גְבוּהוֹ (Kaiser 1983:47; cf. Hentschk 1979:356).

The Hebrew root גָּבַהּ and the Akkadian *gab’u* [height] are possibly connected. In Hebrew and Arabic, the root could mean ‘to be proud’. The Hebrew root and the Arabic ‘*gabahu*’ [‘to meet’ or ‘confront’, figuratively ‘to be proud’] align with the Hebrew meaning. The Akkadian root *gbh* [‘having a bald head’] is unrelated to גָּבַהּ [‘to be high’]. The Hebrew root can describe actions and behaviours deemed religiously and ethically evil (Hentschk 1979:356).

Assimilation<sup>2</sup> might have occurred during manuscript copying, replacing familiar formulations. It is probable that the scribe intended גְבוּהוֹ [‘haughtiness’] instead of גְבוּהוֹ [‘height’]. Translators have interpreted this as an unintentional error where the scribe’s eye skipped from one word to the next. The prophet likely described the women of Zion as elevating themselves to an exalted position because of their wealth.

## Deceptive eyes

The word מְשַׁקְרֹת [hapax legomenon] appears only here in the MT and is interpreted as ‘wanton’. Thom (1995:21) explains that wanton eyes could mean setting their eyes falsely with paint (stibium), a fashion common among Eastern people in ancient times. The LXX interprets it as ‘winking of the eyes’. Some manuscripts suggest ‘deceiving’ eyes. In Jeremiah 4:30, Israelite women used make-up not for lips but for eyes, making them appear larger and more shining. Thus, the women of Zion’s eyes were unusual or deceptive, reflecting their haughtiness through cosmetics (Scott 1952:192; cf.). Watts (1985:46; cf. Thom 1995:22; see also Rees 2022:174) contends that the list also contains cosmetics. בִּשְׁמֵם was the oil of the balsam tree, an expensive item imported from Sheba and Ragma (Ezk 27:22; 2 Chr 9:1). It was used in worship (Ex 25:6) and as a cosmetic (Es 2:12; Ec 4:10, 14). The women of Zion likely used perfumes to give themselves a sweet smell. They also used stibium to falsify their looks, which is currently referred to as make-up.

## Manner of walk

The word טָפַף [hp] in the MT is used only in Isaiah 3:16 (Wigram 1999:484). It is related to טָף [‘child, infant’] and translated as ‘mincing’ or ‘tripping’. The etymology and Semitic background of טָף are disputed, often associated with Ethiopian טָפַף [‘infant’] or Arabic *tanifa* [‘to be uneasy’ or ‘suspicious’]. טָף often denotes those unable to keep up with military campaigns (Num 32:16f, 24–26; Deut 3:19; Josh 1:14; cf. Kohlenberger III & Swanson 1998:484; see also Locher 1979:346–350).

The second meaning of טָף is ‘household’, including women, children, the elderly and slaves (Gn 43:8; 47:12, 24; 50:8, 21; Ex

2. Assimilation can refer to two related but distinct processes. The first involves a scribe altering a word to make it resemble a nearby word. The second process of assimilation involves incorporating wording from a parallel narrative, witness or text into the copy text (West 1973:24).

10:10, 24). The LXX uses παιζω ['to play as a child'], describing the women drawing their garments in trains and sporting with their feet. The word רַטַּט might be an unintentional alteration from רַט, describing the women's childlike walk because of ornamental ankle chains. Scholars (Scott 1952:192; cf. Locher 1979:346–350; see also Young 1965:170; Thom 1995:21) argue that ornamental chains necessitated mincing steps with their feet rattling bangles to create a tinkling sound. Their manner of walking was dictated by their acquired taste of fashion that was alien to their culture.

### Significance of outward appearance

There is growing scholarly interest in dress and appearance within the Hebrew scriptures. This renewed interest has brought Isaiah 3:16–23 into the centre of scholarly activity (cf. Finitis 2022:1; Otto 2019:323–330; Quick et al. 2022:474; see also Rambiert-Kwasniewska 2021:717). Dress and the act of dressing are not merely practical or incidental; they serve as expressions that convey dynamic, symbolic and significant meanings. Dress often differentiates and distinguishes through its symbols, even before verbal communication occurs (Weingartner 2022:X).

Dress and appearance serve as potent non-verbal indicators of socio-economic status and moral values, reflecting one's religious beliefs (Bacchiocchi 1995:26). This may explain why the prophet Isaiah was angered by the choices the women of Jerusalem made in their choice of dress, including excessive ornamentation. Finitis (2022:6; cf. Van Oorschot 2019:239) argues that dresses play a vital role in social interactions and are key to defining one's identity.

Rees (2022:165; see also Eicher & Roach-Higgins 1992:1) defines 'dress'<sup>3</sup> as both body modifications and supplements to the body, including not only clothes but also jewellery and cosmetics. When used as a verb, 'dress' encompasses all actions taken to create an appearance or alter the body. As a noun, 'dress' refers to the collection of body modifications and accessories worn by an individual at a particular moment. This suggests that research should consider both the 'what' and 'how' aspects of dress. It is asserted that 'dress is both a product and a process'. Consequently, any study aiming to explore the significance of dress should investigate both methods and outcomes (Finitis 2022:2; see also Lennon, Johnson & Rudd 2017:3). However, this article will be restricted to the noun aspect of dress, as the text does not lend itself to investigate how those items in Isaiah 3:16–23 were created.

### Significance of dress

The significance of clothes or dress cannot be overemphasised in terms of cultural differentiation, socioeconomic status and religious and moral beliefs. Otto (2019:323) insists that during the pre-exilic and even the post-exilic covenant code, clothes or dress were equated to silver and food in significance (cf. Ex 21:10 and 22:7–8). This makes clothes both an assert and basic

<sup>3</sup>The term dress is preferred over clothes because of the inclusive nature of its definition. However, clothes and dress will be used interchangeably.

necessity of life. Therefore, the covenant people were admonished not to keep the clothes of the poor beyond sunset. This is because it could be the only protection from the elements of the weather, especially during the night.

Genesis 3:7 is the first reference to clothes and clothing in the Old Testament. The first man and woman stitched fig leaves to make 'waist-clothes', but God had a different concept of how humanity should appear.

Packaging is important to industrialists and corporations, who spend significant resources designing clothing to fit the corporate image of various organisations. The elected people of Zion were expected to maintain a standard befitting their status. Genesis 3:7 suggests that God is concerned with what his people wear and how they appear in public. Genesis 3:21 notes that God provided them with skin tunics instead of fig leaf waist-clothes. The women of Zion could not wear just anything, especially when clothing and clothes were defined by culture, which in turn influenced religious beliefs. Unfortunately, the women of Zion copied some styles of dress from surrounding nations.

The priests in the Levitical system were identified by their unique dress code, and the Levites were also recognised by their attire. The Old Testament prophets were known for their distinctive dress (Zch 13:4). It was crucial for the women of Zion to distinguish themselves from the women of other nations around them.

At this point, it is worthwhile to state that 'clothes and appearance are among the most powerful non-verbal communicators, not only of one's socio-economic status but also of one's moral values' (Bacchiocchi 1963:26). People are often judged by what they wear: 'A person's outward appearance is a visible and silent testimony of his or her religious values' (Bacchiocchi 1963:26). It was unacceptable for them to dress like their neighbours and still wish to be seen and recognised as women of Zion. It can be suggested that proper adornment and beauty should reflect the glory of God.

## Socio-psychological significance of clothes

Dress can be described as 'a collection of alterations to the body and/or additions to it'. Body modifications include various practices such as cosmetic treatments, tanning, piercings, tattoos, dieting, exercise and cosmetic surgeries, among others. Body supplements refer to items like clothing, accessories, hearing aids and glasses, though these examples are not exhaustive (Roach-Higgins & Eicher 1992:1; see also Johnson et al. 2014:1). Before the turn of the century, there was a concerted interdisciplinary effort by sociologists, psychologists, social psychologists and economists to study the correlation between dress and human behaviour (Rudd 1991:24). The social psychology of dress could include many aspects, such as how a person's clothes affect their beliefs, behaviour, conceptualisation, moods and attitudes, as well as

how they are modelled and perceived by others and themselves (Johnson & Lennon 2014:1).

In this regard, two thematic areas will be briefly examined: How an individual is perceived because of the body modification (dress) they wear and the influence on the wearer's attitude.

### You are what you wear

Using role theory,<sup>4</sup> Johnson et al. (2014:1–24) seek to find out how an individual's outward appearance influences how they are perceived by others and themselves. They discovered that individuals, especially women and girls, who wore revealing dresses (sexually explicit, e.g., short skirts with slits and low-cut blouses) and heavy cosmetics were perceived as attractive, unintelligent and morally bankrupt compared to those who wore dresses that covered all vital and sexually stimulating portions of the body with little or no cosmetics. They also found that there is a conscious and calculated attempt by major fashion brands and clothing industries to design dresses for women and even young girls that project a sexually provocative style (objectification). Not only sexually provocative dresses but also the colour of an outfit could suggest certain character traits about the wearer. Red and black are perceived as more romantic and make the wearer more attractive than other colours such as white, green or blue (Johnson et al. 2014:2–8; cf. Quick et al. 2022:475). When Tamar covered her head with a veil, she was mistaken as a prostitute (cf. Gn 38:14–16; cf. Quick et al. 2022:482).

### You become what you wear

On the other hand, Johnson et al. (2014:1–24) also explore how the dress people wear influences how they perceive themselves. Several studies (cf. Martin et al. 2007; Frederickson et al. 1998; Hebl et al. 2004) suggest that dress or body modification impacts an individual's mental and intellectual performance. In a study where participants took a maths test, all those in swimsuits performed poorly, while those in sweaters performed well. In another study, different men with different sexual orientations were given different clothes (Speedo men's briefs or turtle-neck sweaters), and their eating habits were observed. Gay men in Speedo men's briefs ate less of the snack than gay men in turtle-neck sweaters; however, wearing the Speedo men's briefs did not affect the eating habits of heterosexual men (Johnson et al. 2014:8). The colour of the dress worn by competing teams influence either their behaviour or the referee's bias in another study. Those who wore black-coloured outfits received significantly more penalties for aggressive behaviour compared to those who wore bright-coloured outfits like white (cf. Frank & Gilovich 1988). This could suggest that the colour of dress people wear can influence their behaviour.

4. Role theory is described as a set of behaviours that have a socially agreed-upon purpose and follow an established set of norms. The theory suggests that when individuals take on new roles, they adjust their behaviour to align with the expectations associated with those roles (cf. Kruger & Serpell 2010:33).

### Analysis of articles of finery (vv. 18–23)

Some scholars (cf. Brown, Drivers & Briggs 1937:802; Kaiser 1963:48; Rees 2022:172) doubt the authenticity of verses 18–23, they insist that it could have been added by an editor or redactor. Alexander (1974:117; see also Rees 2022:175) argues that the passage lists detached particulars, not a complete dress description. The interest is archaeological and not a description of a complete dress code. It appears that jewellery has its origins intertwined with cult and magic systems (cf. Witt 2019:291).<sup>5</sup> The word סור [‘remove’] is often used to speak of idol removal in the Bible (Gn 35:2; Jos 24:14, 23; Jdg 10:16; 1 Sm 7:3, 4). Many items listed might have originated from cult and magic rituals, indicating syncretism, defiling one's covenant with God (Watts 1985:46). The articles of finery are examined to create a vivid picture of ancient items, comparing them to current likeness if possible.

**Ankle-clasps:** עכסיים [‘ākāsîm] were rings of gold, silver or ivory, worn around the ankles. The parent noun עכם is anklet or bangle. עכם: Shaking bangles rattle or tinkle. This anklet is probably made out of ribbon and ‘rows of beads, the sun and the moon [Šēvisîm and saḥrōnîm] pendants might have hung on it as well. This anklet is believed to have protective value for the wearer. This denominative verb occurs only in the piel in Isaiah 3:16 (Cf. Keil & Delitzsch 1996:95; see also Létourneau, De Doncker & Roy-Tureon 2022:449).

**Headbands:** שביסים [Šēvisîm] or frontlets were plaited bands of gold or silver thread worn below the hairnet, reaching from one ear to the other (Cf. Keil & Delitzsch 1996:95; contra Létourneau et al. 2022:450). The LXX renders it as κοσμηθεις, meaning a ‘head net’ or ‘network’ (cf. Horsnell 1991:30; contra Létourneau et al. 2022:450). It is commonly supposed to mean ‘caps or network worn on the head’. The word is sometimes referred to as ‘small suns’<sup>6</sup> or spangles worn on the hair (cf. Létourneau et al. 2022:450; see also Rees 2022:182). Barnes (1972:104) argues that it extends about four inches long to the brow line with the nose, or as Nichol (1978:117) puts it, ‘head nets or headbands of gold or silver worn over the head, from ear to ear’. Brown et al. (1969:959) simply defined the word שבו as a ‘hair net’. It is most probable that it was a headgear decorated with precious stones like that worn by *Mfante* women [Tekua] of Ghana on festive occasions.

**Little moons:** שהרנים [saḥrōnîm<sup>7</sup>] literally translates to ‘little moons’, probably crescent-shaped pendants worn as necklaces (Nichol 1978:117). These were tiny jewellery pieces attached around the neck (cf. Létourneau et al. 2022:450), dangling down upon the chest. Young (1965:165) guesses that these were ‘metallic ornaments in the shape of moons’. Judges 8:22 also makes reference to a ‘moon-shaped ornament around the neck of a camel’. Initially meant for protection

5. Archaeological findings suggest that some of the jewellery unearthed had inscriptions which were religious in nature (cf. Witt 2019:291).

6. Here we have an item that could suggest object of worship ‘Sun’ either as a god or religious icon.

7. Closely related to this name is Šabisa/Sabis which was the name of an Arabic deity and the term sahar is the name of a moon god (cf. Létourneau et al. 2022:450).

against evil spirits (religious objects), they later became pleasing ornaments. It is most probable that שהרנים were moon-shaped necklaces that originally served as amulets. This knowledge elucidates the prophet's displeasure with the daughters of Zion for using such items (syncretism).

**Ear pendants:** נטיפות has been interpreted as 'earrings' or 'eardrops' and compared with the Arabic *munattafe*, meaning women adorned with earrings. From the word *nattafat*, which means 'a small pearl' or 'earring'. The root נטף means 'to drop,' so it could be translated as 'drop-shaped ear pendants. These were probably pendants hanging from the ears. Kaiser (1963:80) renders it 'earrings dangle from their earlobes, hanging on a chain, shaped like droplets or with several elements'. נטיפות could be translated as drop-shaped earrings, a style still in use today (Cf. Keil & Delitzsch 1996:95; Oswalt 1986:142; Young 1965:165).

### Bracelets

שירות were chains worn on the arm or spangles on the wrist, corresponding to the spangles on the ankles. Kaiser (1963:80) elaborates, 'bronze bracelets shine on their arms, the open ends of which often had the shape of an animal's head; some are even made of pure, heavy gold'. Young (1965:165) simply calls them 'bracelets'. However, LXX places the word in verse 20; this word could be rendered as bracelet or arm-chain. Bracelets are still fashionable today, and many women use them to complement their shoes or earrings (Cf. Keil & Delitzsch 1996:95).

### Veils

רעלות was a kind of veil more expensive than the ordinary veils worn by girls, which were called *tza'iph* (Cf. Keil & Delitzsch 1996:95; see also Létourneau et al. 2022:151–153). It has been rendered as veils, scarves or long veils, in other words, flowing veils. Some scholars (cf. Oswalt 1986:142; Young 1965:165) believe that this word רעלות has its root from the Arabic *ra'l*, designated as a two-part veil, one part thrown back over the head above the eyes while the other part covers the lower part of the face. To distinguish between an ordinary veil and this two-part veil, this word could be rendered a fluttering veil. Kaiser (1983:80) reveals that veils supported by a turban, concealing their faces, are not very clear unless seen as two sets of veils held together by a headdress, one in front and the other behind. It is most probable this was a flowing veil.

### Headdresses

פארים was a headdress worn by luxurious women and men of position, such as high priests (Ex 39:28), Levitical priests (Ezk 44:18) and bridegrooms (Is 61 :3. 10; cf. Rees 2022:176). It has been described as a turban or various types of headdresses, including diadems, ribbons, hats or highly decorated hairpins. In both Exodus 39:28 and Ezekiel 44:18, priests wore turbans as part of their priestly attire. This word likely encompasses different kinds of headdresses because it is in the plural form compared to the singular form found in Isaiah 61:3, 10. Some scholars ( cf. Keil & Delitzsch 1996:95;

Young 1965:165; see also Létourneau et al. 2022:451–453) believe it refers to diadems or circlets of gold or silver, even though Oswalt (1986:142) quotes the Targum's rendition as crowns. LXX simply refers to them as an array of glorious ornaments. A composite of LXX and MT could be useful: an array of glorious headdresses.

### Step-chains

צעדות were probably designed to give a short mincing step in connection with ankle bracelets, referencing Isaiah 3:16, where women took short mincing steps [*akasim*]. Nichol (1978:116) contends that oriental women often decorated their legs as much as their arms, possibly wearing bracelets on both. Brown et al. (1969:857; see also Rees 2022:177) define the word as 'armlet', a band clasping the upper arm, step-chain, or ladies' finery. Some scholars (cf. Kaiser 1983:80; Keil & Delitzsch 1996:95; Young 1965:165) suggest that צעדות is a small chain worn by women to restrict their walk and help them trip in a flirtatious way, possibly a stepping chain.

### Sashes

קשרים seems to have various interpretations. Oswalt (1986:142) quotes Targum's interpretation as 'hairpins', and LXX renders it as 'braiding or wreath work' and crowns (cf. Witt 2019:295). The KJV translates it as headband, RSV and NIV as sashes and NEB as necklaces or adornments for a bride. Young (1965:166) calls קשרים 'girdle, ornaments of the bride' (Jr 2:32). Kaiser (1983:80) describes it as a girdle worn over the hip and perhaps over the breast band. Nichol (1978:177) renders it as 'band for the head or for the breast, a highly ornamental article of dress in eastern lands, particularly worn by brides'. Brown et al. (1969:192; cf. Rees 2022:177) define it as 'bands, sashes, or other ornaments worn by women'. Scott (1952:192; cf. Witt 2019:300) suggests that it may refer to 'belts made of beads'. In neo-Hebrew, the word means band or beads. It is most probable that קשרים was an ornamented belt.

### Amulets

לחשים has been associated with charms or amulets. Brown et al. (1969:538; see also Rees 2022:177) define it as 'whisper, charm, possibly, originally serpent-charm, charms or amulets worn by women'. Young (1965:166) suggests that it could be amulets or charms inscribed with an incantation. This is based on BDB's description of the word as a whisper or an amulet. It is most probable that it was an amulet containing magical words worn to produce some magical effects (cf. Brown et al. 1969:538; see also Witt 2019:293).

### Rings

טבשים has been interpreted as rings. Kaiser (1983:81; cf. Rees 2022:177) states that Hebrew women were as fond as contemporary women of wearing rings on their fingers. Sometimes, a signet ring with a cylinder or stamp as a seal, or perhaps a scarab, testified to the woman's exalted status and her personal legal rights (cf. Witt 2019:295–299). Brown et al. (1969:538; cf. Young 1965:166) define it as rings for ornament,

including finger, nose, earring or signet rings (Gn 41:42; Ex 35:22; Nm 31:50; Es 8:8, 3:12).

### Bags

הרִיטִים is defined by Brown et al. (1969:355; see also Rees 2022:178) as a 'bag' or 'purse', comparable to an Arabic bag or purse made of skin or other material. LXX differs markedly in order and translation, placing it in verse 22. Some scholars (Young 1965:166; cf. Oswalt 1986:142) believe that it was 'pockets', possibly for storing previously mentioned shawls. Oswalt et al. argue that הרִיטִים has some connection with the Arabic word *haratatu* meaning 'flounced skirt', possibly 'purses' or 'handbags' (cf. Oswalt 1986:142; Young 1965:166).

### Gauze garments

גלונים is a controversial word in the text, with varied interpretations (cf. Rees 2022:177). LXX's statement, τα διαφανα δακωνιδα [some kind of see-through], interpreting it as 'a kind of silken dress, transparent, like gauze, worn only by the most elegant women'. These garments reveal the shape of every body part and the skin's colour. Scott (1952:192) translates it as 'a garment of gauze'. גלונים, from the root word *galah*, means 'to uncover' or 'to reveal'. Platt (1979:195, 200; see also Rees 2022:176,178) calls it a thin garment and she argues that some of the items listed in Isaiah 3:16–23 were used by both males and females. Whether גלונים refers to transparent garments or mirrors, as some authorities suggest, transparent dresses were common in ancient Egypt and might have been adopted by the women of Zion. Polished metal mirrors were also common in the ancient Orient (Ex 38:8). Because other items in the list are worn articles, גלונים likely refers to transparent garments, as these were fashionable at the time (cf. Clark 2002:1–11; Nichol1978:116).

**Jewellery<sup>8</sup> in the Ancient Near East:** Horsnell (1991:322; cf. Witt 2019) believes that:

[J]ewellery in the Ancient Near East was a valued possession and included necklaces, shell necklaces, rings, head decorations or turbans, earrings, nose rings, anklets, bracelets, headbands or sun-like ornaments, and pearls. (p. 292)

Therefore, jewellery encompasses not only precious metals but any valued possession used as part of a dress code. Ornament is also a valued possession but not necessarily used for personal beautification. Witt (2019:292) defines 'jewellery to denote beautiful artefacts designed to be displayed visibly on the body'. They are usually made out of good artistry or valuable metals. Therefore, any item displayed visibly on the body beyond the basic need and function of clothes for their aesthetic value can be described as jewellery. Jewellery was not only worn for beauty but also for other purposes such as rank, religion, colours, treatment, experimentation and stargazing in ancient times (cf. Witt 2019:293).

8. Definition of what constitute jewellery is dependent on culture and time (cf. Witt 2019:292).

## Male, female, leadership, and ceremonial insignias

Platt (1979:195–200; cf. Rees 2022:167; see also Finitis 2022:9) argues that the items listed in the text were not exclusively female articles or ornaments; rather, some were used by men, including royal insignia for kings, headgear for priests and bridegroom's regalia for weddings. One might wonder why the prophet singled out women for condemnation for using such items. Rees (2022:171) contends that the items in the list were used by the women of Jerusalem as a construct to demonstrate the inversion of societal norms. Whereby women were seen using royal insignia previously reserved for men in positions of authority. She draws her argument from the passage stating that 'women would be ruling over you' (Is 3:12). This is placed against the background of the injunction in Deuteronomy 22:5, which prohibits the use of dress meant for the opposite sex. She concludes by insisting that the daughters of Zion were subverting the natural order of society. Here again one can deduce arrogance or haughtiness on the part of the women, arrogating to themselves what did not belong to them as women.

The prophet's portrayal of the women in this passage is almost satirical. He presented them as parading through the streets of Jerusalem adorned in royal regalia, such as crowns and possibly signet rings on their fingers, the high priest's headgear and the attire of a groom. Alternatively, they may be depicted wearing transparent gauze-like (see-through) textiles, with amulets or charms on their wrists and arms and faces painted with stibium (cosmetics). Some may even have moon-shaped charms and sun-like amulets around their necks and ankles. What is more, while they take flirtatious, mincing steps with necks tilted and eyes accentuated with cosmetics (contra Alexander 1974:117; see also Rees 2022:175). This lends support to the suggestion that the passage was an interpolation by a later editor or a copying scribe (cf. Rees 2022:172; Kaiser 1963:48; Brown, Driver & Briggs 1937:802). However, there is no reason to doubt the authenticity of the passage or the list of dresses described therein. It is possible that the women had become exceedingly proud, prompting the prophet to reprove them.

### Any religious connotation – syncretism?

Jewellery were usually decorated with religious incantations and they served the dual purpose of protection as well as articles of dress among some ancient cultures. Sometimes religious icons were worn as pendants, anklets, bangles or necklaces with the hope of achieving the dual aim of beautification and spiritual protection. This dual role of jewellery blurred the divide between dress and worship in relationship with the use of jewellery (cf. Witt 2019:303).

It was forbidden for the covenant people of God to make use of any graven image either in the form of charms, a talisman, the moon, the sun or an icon of any deity because it was a sin and a breach of the covenant relationship. According to the words used to describe the list of finery or jewellery in Isaiah

3:16 and 18–23, these had some connection with the cult and magic rituals and the belief in a spiritual force. The ‘daughters of Zion’ were compromising their faith (syncretism) in Yahweh by the use of these items, and by so doing had subjected themselves to the wrath of their covenant God.

The female inhabitants of Jerusalem might have copied the cultures of the surrounding nations and in so doing, inadvertently, copied their religious practices. This is because religion and culture are intertwined and they were forbidden from using their clothes or their religious icons (cf. Zph 1:8).

Words like טור [removal of idols] are also used elsewhere to speak of the removal of idols: Gn 35:2; Jos 24:14. 23; Jdg 10:16; 1 Sm 7:3, 4; etc. להשיים [moon gods] לחשיים [charms] give credence to the argument that the issue at stake was not only the use of these items as articles of beautification but also as religious objects (syncretism) that caused offence to the covenant God of the nation and threatened judgement to the women and the nation as a whole. This is because the newly established nation was forbidden from having any other god besides Yahweh, their covenant God. They were not supposed to make any graven image, not even the likeness of anything in heaven or on earth, or what is in the water under the earth. They were not to bow down to them, nor serve them:

[F]or I the Lord your God I am a jealous God, visiting the iniquities of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; And showing mercy unto thousands of them that love, and keep my commandments. (Ex 20:3–6)

From the items listed in Isaiah 3:18–23, it could be assumed that ‘indeed many of the items listed originated from cult and magic rituals’<sup>9</sup> of the nations around them and they were not to make or use any images of any deity of any kind. By accepting these objects, they had compromised their faith and their covenant with their God. This, from the prophet’s perspective, was enough grounds for judgement to be pronounced on the city and her inhabitants. After the exegesis of the passage has been performed and has been analysed in its own right, the ‘Does the passage prohibit jewellery’ section would look at whether the passage could be used to prohibit the use of jewellery.

### Does the passage prohibit jewellery?

The items listed in the passage did not only comprise jewellery made out of precious stones but ostentatious articles in general. The text suggests that showy dresses should be prohibited. They could be a reflection of inner pride, which is detestable to God. The use of splashy items could include the wearing of jewellery, cosmetics, perfumes, expensive clothes, ornamented hats and belts, ribbons, ornamented hairpins, ornamented tie pins, wigs, bags expensive hair extensions, etc. This is because they could be

9.Watts, ‘Haughty Daughters of Zion’ Word Biblical Commentary volume 24, Isaiah 1–33, p. 46.

an outward sign of a haughty spirit, which is an abomination to God.

It is therefore not surprising why ‘the church fathers and the apostles advised Christians not to wear expensive clothes. In fact, the church fathers encouraged Christians to limit the consumption of luxurious items’ (Tm 1 2:9–10; Pt 2 3:3,4; cf. Bercot 1999:176, 379, 380, 568; Bodin 2022:1).

## Contribution of the women of Zion to national sin

It is, however, very clear, in the passage, what was wrong with the women, and that was haughtiness, which was an abomination to their covenant God. ‘Everyone that is proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord: Though they join hand in hand, none shall be unpunished’ (Pr 16:5). This manifested in the manner the women walked with short stripping steps, outstretched necks fretting with their eyes and the use of the items of ostentation (vv. 18–23).

The prophet did not leave anybody in doubt as to what had occupied his mind, concerning the women of Zion’s ‘haughtiness’. Haughtiness could be expressed in the way people speak, the way they walk, the way they live and even in their expenditure. Here in this passage, the women of Zion demonstrated their proud spirit in the way they adorned themselves. By virtue of the covenant relationship Judah had with their covenant God, their significance was to be based on their relationship with Him as their God and not because of anything else:

Thus says the Lord: Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the Lord. (Jr 9:23–24)

His concern was for the people to desist from haughty behaviour and adopt a quiet and sober character.

## Conclusion

The study set out with the following objectives: To evaluate the significance of the articles of dress or outward appearance. Whether the items have religious connotations besides the basic purpose of clothing for covering? To enquire whether the passage prohibits the use of jewellery, or ostentatious clothing or dress. To find out whether the items were exclusively female dresses. The items listed in verses 18–23 were made up of ostentatious items in general and not only jewellery (as in precious stones made into trinkets). The passage cannot be used to prohibit the use of jewellery; however, it suggests that luxurious items are not encouraged by people of faith. The items were not exclusively female dress; however, some of the items were used by men, especially those in positions of authority. Here the passage suggests that pride was the issue at stake with the women of Zion. Their haughtiness was demonstrated in their dresses

and manners in public. It was not befitting of the women of Zion to indulge in pride of appearance and the use of flaunt items. The text also suggests that a covenant relationship with God required a certain decorum in dress, which did not include the use of ostentatious dress and items with questionable religious and cultural backgrounds. The study found out that some of the items were both for beautification and protection. It was against their covenant relationship to consult other gods for protection. Unfortunately, by using those items, the women violated the commandment that prohibits the use of other gods. This amounts to syncretism and is an abomination to their relationship with God. Therefore, the women, and by extension the nation, were due for judgement.

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## Authors' contributions

P.N.-M. conceptualised and wrote the article under the supervision of D.H.J.

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## Data availability

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and are the product of professional research. It does not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated institution, funder, agency or that of the publisher. The authors are responsible for this article's results, findings and content.

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