The extent of the literary unit in Isaiah li 1 ff. has been a matter of dispute for some time. In the past scholarly opinion has generally opted for either li 1-8 ¹) or li 1-16. ²) Recently Claus Westermann has proposed a radical reconstruction of the text and construes the literary unit to consist of the following (post-exilic!) passages in the order set down: li 1a; 1 10-11; li 4-6; li 7a, 1b, 2, 7b. ³)

In this article we are suggesting that Isaiah li 1-11, as it now stands, be regarded as the literary unit. ⁴) We hope to demonstrate that this material conforms to a chiastic pattern believing that the existence of such a structure in li 1-11 constitutes a weighty argument for considering it to be a literary unit. ⁵) Following is the text of li 1-11


²) E.g., James Muelenburg, "Isaiah 40-66," IB, 5, p. 588; C. C. Torrey, The Second Isaiah, p. 394; Karl Marti, Das Buch Jesaja, p. 336. Johann Fischer, Das Buch Isaias, II, pp. 119-24, holds the unit to be li 1-14 with vss. 15-16 (as well as vss. 4-5a) being the work of a glossator. Both Fischer, ibid., p. 123 and Marti, op. cit., p. 339, along with a number of other scholars, believe that Isaiah li 11 (cp. xxxv 10) is an insertion in its present place. However, those defending the originality of this passage in its present position are not few, for example: Kissane, op. cit., p. 163; North, op. cit., p. 213; Volz, op. cit., p. 117, n.f. Such also is the inclination of Muelenburg, op. cit., p. 598, although he concedes that vs. 11 "may be an insertion."

³) Das Buch Jesaja, (ATD), 1966, pp. 188-92. He removes vs. 3, which he regards as a hymn fragment whose opening imperatives have been lost (cp. xlii 13, lii 9), to a position following this reconstructed text. We feel that Westermann's arguments for this arrangement of the text are, for the most part, of a subjective nature and are unconvincing. We agree with the majority of commentators who retain the present order of li 1-8.

⁴) James Smart, in his volume on History and Theology in Second Isaiah, p. 177, cautiously states: "If there is the suggestion of a break anywhere, it comes between vs. 11 and 12, and yet vss. 12-16 can be read as God's answer to the prophet's prayer in vss. 9-10." On page 185 he appears to have decided for a break after verse 16.

⁵) It is conceivable that only part of the poetic unit is in chiastic form and therefore one must allow the possibility of the full unit being li 1-16, as some
structured in a chiastic pattern with the key words italicized. 1)

1. 'elay rodepe mebaqše yhbh
   habbitu 'el-šür hussabtem
   wo'el maqqebet bör nuqqartem

2. a habbitu 'el- 'abrahām 'ahīkem
   wo'el šārā təḥōlel kem
   ki-‘ehād qeरā’tiw
   wa'ahārəḵēhū wo’arbehū

3. ki-niham yhbh ʃyön
   niham kol horboṭēbā
   wayyāšem midbārāh ke ʃe’den
   wo'arbaṭāh kəgan yhbh
   šā’in we’simhā yimmāṣe’ ḫāh
tōdā weqōl zimrā

4. haqibis
   'elay
   ōmni
   ūle’tūmmi
   B
   ha'a-zinū
   ki tōrā mē‘itti tēṣē'
   ūmispāṭi le‘or ōmmim

5. C
   'argiaq qārōb ʃidqi
   yāsā ʃiʃṭ
   D ūqeroʿay ōmmim yišpōtū
   E 'elay ʿiyīm yeqawwū
   D' wo'el qeroʿt ye'yahelūn

6. se'ū lassāmāyim 'eṇēkem
   wehabbiṭu 'el-hā'ares mittahat
   ki-sāmāyim ke‘āsān nimlāhū
   C' we'hā'ares kabbeged tiḥlē
   weyosḥēhā kəmo-kən ye‘mūṭūn
   wiṣū‘āṭi le‘olām tiḥyē
   weṣidgāṭi lō’ tēbāt

commentators affirm. It is, of course, true that verses 12-16 have some affinities with verses 1-11 but it may be doubted whether they are of such importance as to demand that the unit be stretched to include them.

1) The text is that of the third edition of Biblia Hebraica (ed. R. Kittel), reprint 1951, which we have accepted without alteration.