

LIBRETTO

The Israelites in the Wilderness

PART I

I. Chorus of Israelites

Our mouths are parched,
we can scarcely breathe.
All around us is the grave.
God, you do not hear the complaint of woe,
you turn your face away from us.

2. Recitative

FIRST ISRAELITE WOMAN

Is this the God of Abraham?
The God who promised
never to forget,
never to abandon his chosen people?
We hunger, we fade away.
We have nothing to drink
but these tears we shed.
The Lord enjoys our downfall,
and no longer remembers his own.

3. Aria

FIRST ISRAELITE WOMAN

Does he wish his people to be ruined?
Are we no longer his heirs?
Does he watch without pity
the suffering that oppresses us?
You shall never, never again
sigh and weep,
brothers in kinship,
slumbering in death's arms,
ah, how fortunate you are!

4. Accompanied Recitative

AARON

Honored be the will of the Eternal,
honored be he, who indeed still loves you,

even if his wise counsel upsets you!
Stop, stop filling the air with complaints,
which call down ever greater distress upon you!
Place your hope in the Lord! He will quiet the cares
that beset you. His eyes watch
with care over a heart that puts its full trust in him.

5. Aria

AARON

He has brought you this far,
has protected you and watched over you;
in future, too, his arm will guide you.
His word is your bond.
The sun's brightness may dim,
the earth may deviate from its path,
but what God promises to mortals
remains unshaken to eternity.

6. Recitative

SECOND ISRAELITE WOMAN

Why did we leave
Egypt's blooming land, the seat of abundance,
and follow you and the counsel of Moses?
Alas, for the wasteful, foolish decision,
how we are punished with regret for it, too late!

7. Aria

SECOND ISRAELITE WOMAN

Oh, return us to those walls,
far from which we weep,
Oh, return us to them!
Were we thus born to suffer?
Only now, having lost our happiness,
do we recognize it.

8. Recitative

AARON

Moses constantly beseeches favor for you
from the Eternal, oh, do not move him to wrath
through your impatience.
He approaches us. The grumbling of your tongues
has reached his ears.

9. Symphony

10. Recitative

MOSES

What shrieking resounds in my ears,
rises to the throne of the Lord
and incites his vengeance?

11. Chorus of Israelites

You are the cause of our troubles,
you have led us into death.
God slumbers, and we have no hope
that he will awaken and come to our aid.

12. Recitative

MOSES

Ungrateful people, have you already forgotten
the wondrous works
your God has performed for you? Your heart rises up
sharply against him, the God of strength,
who in mercy so often hastened to your protection,
at whose sign the flood waters parted,
and let you pass untouched by any drop,
and let them close over the heads of your enemies.
You grumble against him,
who, when hunger pursued you,
fed you with bread from heaven.
Bow down in humility, and if you love life,
then honor him who gave it to you!
Believe, for nothing but this can soothe your
unhappiness!
God will put you to the test; pray to him!

13. Duet

FIRST ISRAELITE WOMAN

Our tears are futile,
in vain have they flowed,
no consolation descends to us.

SECOND ISRAELITE WOMAN

He will not listen to us.
His heaven remains closed,
no consolation descends to us.

FIRST AND SECOND ISRAELITE WOMEN

The open grave threatens us.
Our lamentations curse
the most terrible of days
that Being has given us.

14. Accompanied Recitative

MOSES

God, my father God, what do you have me see?
What must I hear?

TUTTI

We are passing away.

MOSES

At this ruinous sight
my heart forgets that their cries
ring out,
God, against you.

TUTTI

We are dying.

MOSES

Almighty, forgive! forgive!
Lord, in this moment
reveal the riches of your grace.

TUTTI

Horrid fate!

MOSES

Wrathful one, if you wish to punish,
let your judgment fall on me, Lord,
only spare these here!

TUTTI

It is our doing.

15. Aria

MOSES

God, see your people lying in the dust!
O God of mercy, hear,
hear my humble plea,
you, who cannot betray my hope,
who cannot reject my pleas!
Let this rock, God of strength,
give us the balm for our suffering!

Lord, let Jacob's children live
to honor you, to praise you!
Eternal one, look upon us with mercy!

16. Chorus of Israelites

O wonder! God has heard us!
And fresh silvery streams rush
from this rock, to quiet
the pain that gnaws at our breast.

PART II

17. Recitative

MOSES

You have earned
the wrath of the Lord, yet he has forgiven you.
He seeks, he loves you; oh, did your breast
not burn with gratitude for his goodness,
would you merit existence?
You, who rage against him
in bitter cries of lament,
revile the wisdom of his counsel;
you, whose pain his counsel changes to joy,
oh pray, pray, pray
to the God of mercy, to him who hears my pleas.

18. Aria—Tutti

MOSES

God of Israel, receive
in joyful songs
the fervent thanks of our hearts!

FIRST ISRAELITE WOMAN

In you, God, I trust!
How needless was the dread
that made me tremble.

TUTTI

God of Israel, receive
the fervent thanks of our hearts!

SECOND ISRAELITE WOMAN

I trust in the Lord;
he deigned to be merciful,
when all hope faded.

TUTTI

God of Israel, receive
the fervent thanks of our hearts!

19. Recitative

FIRST ISRAELITE WOMAN

How near we were to death! And oh, how wondrous,
the Eternal through you
saved us from the danger
that hung over us!
How the heart throbs in our breast,
touched by gratitude,
and by the pain of remorse
that we did not devote to the Eternal
the confidence befitting the favor
with which he watches over us and guides our steps.

20. Aria

FIRST ISRAELITE WOMAN

Before the hot rays of noon
the flowers bend their heads down low.
Cool dew covers the earth,
and the blossom rises up again,
fragrant and delightful to the eye.
God looked with mercy on the suffering
his poor people endured,
and from his wondrous hand
the lost strength flowed back
into our weary limbs again.

21. Accompanied Recitative

MOSES

O friends, children, my prayer
has beseeched that refreshment for you,
that renews your strength, and preserves your lives.
Yet one day, as if before my eyes
I see the future illumined,
one day hence, for Adam's sinful world
another one will plead before the judge.
God will bend a merciful ear to his pleas
and shower with eternal bliss those for whom he
beseeches,
those who accept him in all confidence.
In a more perfect Canaan,
O friends, they will follow in his footsteps.
I am for you but his pale image!
He will, when the fullness of time arrives,
appear in mortal shape,
risen in human form.
This is the hero, the seed of woman,

who shall do battle with the serpent and crush his head
underfoot.

He comes and brings peace,
and salvation and blessing is his name.

22. Recitative

SECOND ISRAELITE WOMAN

Enviably she who calls him her son!
Oh, how my heart burns with happy excitement!
The curse brought on her children by Eve's fall
will be called back from the judge's mouth;
creation will then beam upon the happy glance of men,
as it smiled in its springtime.

23. Aria

SECOND ISRAELITE WOMAN

O blessed he whom the Lord protects,
the savior, for whom my desire yearns,
to see the divine one.
With joyful flowing tears
bowed down low to his feet
to praise him in thanks.

24. Recitative

MOSES

Place your hope in the Eternal, wait!
He will show himself merciful to the world,
he will cause heaven to come down,
he will renew the glory of man.

25. Chorus

God's elect, who will expunge Adam's sin,
gift of greatest favor,
appear soon, appear that the world
may once again become a place of peace!
It sighs for you,
full of fervor, as we
yearn for those waters
that quench our thirst,
that enliven our heart, and fill us with joy.

26. Chorale

The greatest wish and yearning
of our band of forefathers,
and what they prophesied,
is fulfilled according to your glory.

27. Accompanied Recitative

TENOR

O salvation of the world, you have appeared,
and you have created the world anew.
When you came the seraphim sang
with heavenly high melody.
You foretold the teachings of the greatest wisdom
and bade your followers go throughout the world,
to mend the ways of the nations
and to glorify your name.
It is fulfilled:
The truth of your teachings
and the renown of your name resounded
from sunrise to sunset;
and your kingdom must increase daily.

28. Chorus

Let your word, that resounds to us
with delightful power,
pierce deep into our hearts!
Let it bear good fruit,
that will gladden your fatherly heart.
Let us, almighty Goodness, dedicate our
breast to be your temple!

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Translator's note:

*To keep the focus on the original text, the choice was made
to follow the German as literally as possible. I thank Ulrich
Leisinger for his kind assistance.*