

# LIBRETTO

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## *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!

*Translation © 2013 by Ruth B. Libbey*

*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.*