

SELECTION FROM
“JEPHTHA,”

AN ORATORIO COMPOSED IN 1751 BY G. F. HANDEL.

CHARACTERS REPRESENTED

IPHIS, Jephtha's Daughter, Soprano
 AN ANGEL, Alto
 STORGE, wife of Zephth, Alto
 JEPHTHA, Judge of Israel and Leader of the Army ... Tenor
 ZEBUL, his half brother, a Warrior, Bass
 Chorus of Israelites.

OVERTURE, *Grave. — Allegro. — Lentement. — Menuet.*

RECIT.—Zebul.
 It must be so; or these vile Ammonites
 (Our lordly tyrant be now these eighteen years)
 Will crush the race of Israel.
 Since heav'n vouchsafest not, with immediate
 choice,
 To point us out a leader, as before,
 Ourselves must choose—And who so fit a man
 As Gilead's son, our brother, valiant Jephtha?
 True, we have slighted, scorn'd, expell'd him
 hence,
 As of a stranger born; but well I know him;
 His generous soul disdains a mean revenge,
 When his distressed country calls his aid.
 And, perhaps, heav'n may favor our request,
 If with repentant hearts we sue for mercy.

AIR.
 Pour forth no more unheeded prayers
 To idols deaf and vain;
 No more with vile unallow'd airs,
 The sacred rites profane.
CHORUS.
 No more to Ammon's god and king,
 Fierce Aloch, shall our cymbals ring,
 In dismal dance about the furnace blue,
 Chemosh no more
 Will we adore,
 With timbr'd anthems, to Jehovah due.

RECIT.—Zebul.
 But Jephtha comes.—Kind heav'n, assist our
 plea!
 O Jephtha, what a sight of pity look'
 Thy face presents to my distress!
 Forgetful of thy woe, I address thy sire,
 Thy friends, thy country, in extreme despair.

Jephtha.
 I will:—so please it heav'n; and these the terms:
 If I command in war, the like command
 (Should heav'n vouchsafe us a victorious peace)
 Shall still be mine.

Zebul.
 Agreed.—Be witness, heaven.
AIR.—Jephtha.
 Virtue my soul shall still embrace,
 Goodness shall make me great,
 Who builds upon this steady base
 Dreads no event of fate.

RECIT.—Storge.
 'Twill be a painful separation, Jephtha,
 To see thee harness'd for the bloody field,
 But ah! how trivial are a wife's concerns,
 When a whole nation bleeds, and grovelling lies,
 Panting for liberty and life.

AIR.
 In gentle murmurs will I mourn
 As mourns the mate-forsaken dove;
 And sighing wish thy return
 To liberty and lasting love.

RECIT.—Jephtha.
 What mean these doubtful fancies of the brain?
 Visions of joy rise in my raptur'd soul,
 There play awhile, and set in darkness night.
 Strange ardour fires my breast; my arms seem
 strung
 With tend'ring vigor, and my crested helm
 To reach the skies.—Be humble still, my soul.
 It is the spirit of God; in whose great name
 I offer up my vow.
 If, Lord, sustain'd by Thy almighty pow'r,
 Ammon I drive, and his insulting bands,
 From these our long-uncultivated lands,
 And safe return a glorious conqueror:—
 What, or whose'er shall first salute mine eyes,
 Shall be for ever thine, or fall a sacrifice.

'Tis said, [Enter Israelites, &c.
 Attend, ye chiefs, and with one voice,
 Invoke the holy name of Israel's God.

CHORUS.
 O God, behold our sore distress;
 Omnipotent, to pluck, or bless!
 But turn Thy wrath, and bless once more
 Thy servants, who Thy name adore.

RECIT.—Iphis.
 Say, my dear mother, whence these piercing
 cries,
 That force me, like a frighted bird, to fly
 My place of rest?

Storge.
 For thee I fear, my child;
 Such ghastly dreams last night surpris'd my
 soul.

Iphis.
 Heed not these black illusions of the night,
 The mocking of unquiet slumbers, heed them
 not
 My father, touch'd with a diviner fire,
 Already seems to triumph in success,
 Nor doubt I but Jehovah hears our prayers.

AIR.
 The smiling dawn of happy days
 Presents a prospect clear;
 And pleasing hope's all bright'ning rays
 Dispel each gloomy fear;
 While every charm that peace displays,
 Makes spring-time all the year.

RECIT.—Zebul.
 Such, Jephtha, was the haughty king's reply:
 No terms—but ruin, slavery, and death.

Jephtha.
 Sound then the last alarm:—and to the field
 Ye sons of Israel with intrepid hearts;
 Depend on the might of Israel's God.

CHORUS.
 When His loud voice in thunder spoke,
 With conscious fear the billows broke,
 Observant of His dread command.
 In vain they roll their foaming tide:
 Confin'd by the Almighty pow'r,
 That gave them strength to roar
 They now contr'ct their boisterous pride,
 And lash with idle rage the laughing strand.
 (Jephtha defeats the enemies of Israel.)

RECIT.—Zebul.
 Again heaven smiles on his repentant people,
 And victory spreads wide her silver wings
 To soothe our sorrows with a peaceful calm.

AIR.
 Freedom now once more possessing,
 Peace shall spread with ev'ry blessing
 Triumphant joy around.

[News being brought to Iphis of her father's victory, she
 goes out with a train of virgins and meets him on his
 return. Struck with horror and despair at the sight,
 he makes known his vow; his daughter resigns her fate
 to his will; he is torn with anguish and remorse, but
 resolves on the fulfilment of his vow.]

RECIT.—Jephtha.
 Deeper, and deeper still, thy goodness, child,
 Pierceth a father's bleeding heart, and checks
 The ernel sentence on my fall'ring tongue.
 Oh! let me whisper it to the raging winds;
 Or howling deserts; for the ears of men
 It is too shocking. Yet—have I not vow'd?
 And can I think the great Jehovah sleeps,
 Like Chemosh, and such fabled deities?
 Ah! no: heav'n heard my thoughts, and wrote
 them down—
 It must be so.—'Tis this that racks my brain,
 And pours into my breast a thousand pangs,

That lash me into madness.—Horrid thought!
 My only daughter!—so dear a child,
 Doem'd by a father!—Yes—the vow is past,
 And Gilead hath triumph'd o'er his foes.
 Therefore, to-morrow's dawn—I can no more.

[Jephtha prepares to offer up his daughter, who in humble
 resignation to what is thought to be the will of Heaven,
 bids adieu to all worldly joys, and prepares for the
 sacrifice.]

AIR.—Jephtha.
 Wait her, angels, through the skies,
 Far above yon azure plain:
 Glorious there, like you, to rise,
 There, like you, for ever reign.

RECIT.—Iphis.
 Ye sacred priests, whose hands ne'er yet were
 stain'd
 With human blood, why are ye thus afraid
 To execute my father's will?—the call
 Of heav'n with humble resignation I obey.

AIR.
 Farewell ye limpid springs and floods,
 Ye flow'ry meads and mazy woods;
 Farewell, thou busy world, where reign
 Short hours of joy, and years of pain.
 Brighter scenes I seek above,
 In the realms of peace and love.

[The Priests, in fear and awe, appeal to the Almighty for
 guidance, upon which an Angel appears, and declares
 the will of God.]

SINFONIA.

RECIT.—Angel.
 Rise, Jephtha, and thy reverend priests, with-
 hold
 The sword's cruel hand.—No vow can disannul
 The law of God.—Nor such was His intent
 When rightly scann'd;—and yet shall be fulfill'd.
 Thy daughter, Jephtha, thou must dedicate
 To God, in pure and virgin-state for ever;
 As not an object meet for sacrifice,
 Else had she fall'n to holocaust to God.
 The Holy Spirit, that dictated thy vow,
 Bids thus explain it, and approves your faith.

AIR.—Zebul.
 Laud her, all ye virgin train,
 In glad songs of choicest strain;
 Ye blest angels all around,
 Laud her in melodious sound:
 Virtues that to you belong,
 Love and truth demand the song.

RECIT.—Storge.
 O let me fold thee in a mother's arms,
 And with submissive joy, my child receive
 Thy designation to the life of heaven.

AIR.
 Sweet as sight to the blind,
 Or freedom to the slave,
 Such joy in thee I find,
 Safe from the grave,
 Still I'm of thee possessed,
 Such is kind Heaven's decree,
 That hath thy parents blessed
 In blessing thee.

RECIT.—Jephtha.
 For ever blessed be Thy holy name,
 Lord God of Israel!
CHORUS.
 Theme sublime of endless praise,
 Just and righteous are Thy ways:
 And Thy mercies still endure,
 Ever faithful, ever sure.

[This termination, although differing from the common
 impression of the result of Jephtha's vow, is sanctioned
 by the opinions of many learned commentators upon the
 portion of Scripture History from whence this subject is
 taken, viz. Judges, chap. x. and xi.]

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