

# Georg Friedrich Haendel

(1714 - 1787)

## Jephtha (*Jephté*)



### Oratorio en 3 actes

Livret de *Thomas Morell*

Première représentation : le 26 février 1752 au Royal Theatre,  
Covent Garden, Londres

---

### Personnages :

**Jephtha**, (ténor)

**Storgè**, son épouse (mezzo-soprano)

**Iphis**, fille de Jephtha (soprano)

**Hamor**, prétendant de Iphis (contre ténor)

**Zebul**, conseiller de Jephtha (baryton-basse)

**L'Ange**, (soprano)

# Synopsis

## Acte I

Sur le conseil de Zebul, Jephtha (Jephté, en français), né d'une fille de joie, est rappelé in extremis de l'exil pour sauver son peuple de l'agression des Ammonites. Jephtha accepte le commandement des armées contre la garantie de préserver sa fonction en temps de paix. Les Israélites y consentent. Jephtha prend congé de son épouse Storgè qui s'inquiète de ce que l'avenir leur réserve. Hamor offre son amour à Iphis, la fille de Jephtha ; elle l'accepte volontiers. Mais le combat approche, et ils doivent se préparer. Aussi excité qu'angoissé par la perspective de la bataille, Jephtha propose à Jéhovah un marché : s'il remporte la victoire, il lui sacrifiera le premier qui viendra l'accueillir après le combat. Les Israélites prient pour une heureuse issue de la guerre, alors que Storgè est hantée par des visions d'horreur. Iphis la console. Dès lors que le roi des Ammonites a rejeté toute tractation, la parole est à Jéhovah.

## Acte II

Hamor apporte à Iphis la bonne nouvelle : le ciel a déversé des légions de chérubins armés, permettant aux Israélites de terrasser l'ennemi. Iphis prépare un accueil triomphal à son père, tandis que Jephtha et les Israélites célèbrent la victoire. On vient saluer le héros, Iphis avance en tête du cortège. Jephtha, bouleversé, avoue son fatal serment : Iphis doit être sacrifiée. Storgè, horrifiée, refuse de se soumettre, alors que Hamor propose sa propre vie en échange de celle d'Iphis. Storgè, Hamor et Zebul supplient Jephtha d'épargner sa fille. Mais Iphis est déjà au courant du verdict, et s'y soumet sans murmurer. Une douleur immense déchire le cœur de Jephtha.

## Acte III

Jephtha prie pour le salut de l'âme d'Iphis. Cette dernière prend congé de la vie. Les prières de tout le peuple l'accompagnent. Avant le coup fatal, un Ange fait son apparition, porteur d'une bonne nouvelle : Iphis vivra, mais pure et vierge, à jamais vouée à Dieu. Jephtha bénit le nom du Seigneur.



Charles Le Brun - *Jephté sur le point de sacrifier sa fille*



Giovanni Antonio Pellegrini - *Le retour de Jephté (détail)*

## Part the First.

### No. 1. OVERTURE.

#### No. 2. RECIT. Zebul.

IT must be so; or these vile Ammonites  
(Our lordly tyrants now these eighteen years)  
Will crush the race of Israel.  
Since heav'n vouchsafes 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; hut well I know him;  
His gen'rous soul disdains a mean revenge.  
When his distressful country calls his aid.  
And, perhaps, heav'n may favour our request  
If with repentant hearts we sue for mercy.

#### No. 3. AIR.

Pour forth no more unheeded pray'rs  
To idols deaf and vain:  
No more with vile unhallow'd airs,  
The sacred rites profane.

#### No. 4. CHORUS.

No more to Ammon's god and king,  
Fierce Moloch, shall our cymbals ring,  
In dismal dance about the furnace blue,  
Chemosh no more  
Will we adore,  
With timbrell'd anthems, to Jehovah due.

#### No. 5. RECIT. Zebul.

But Jephtha comes. Kind heav'n, assist our plea!  
O Jephtha, with an eye of pity look  
On thy repentant brethren in distress.  
Forgetful of thy wrongs, redress 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.

#### No. 6. AIR.\* Jephtha.

Virtue my soul shall still embrace,  
Goodness shall make me great,  
Who builds upon this steady base  
Dreads no event of fate.

#### No. 7 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

#### No. 8 AIR.

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

#### No. 9. RECIT.\* Hamor.

Happy this embassy, my charming Iphis,  
Which once more gives thee to my longing eyes  
As Cynthia breaking from th' involving clouds  
On the benighted traveler, the sight of thee, my love  
Drives darkness and despair.  
Again I live; in thy sweet smiles I live;  
As in thy father's ever watchful care  
Our wretched nation feels new life, new joy,  
O haste and make my happiness complete

#### No 10 AIR.\*

Dull delay in piercing, anguish  
Bids thy faithful lover languish,  
While he pants for bliss in vain.  
Oh! with gentle smiles relieve me;  
Let no more false hopes deceive me,  
Nor vain fears inflict a pain.

#### No. 11. RECIT. Iphis.

Ill suits the voice of love when glory calls,  
And bids thee follow Jephtha to the field.  
Act there the hero, and let rival deeds  
Proclaim thee worthy to be called his son;  
And Hamor shall not want his due reward

#### No. 12. AIR.\*

Take the heart you fondly gave,  
Lodg'd in your breast with mine;  
Thus with double ardour brave,  
Sure conquest shall be thine.

#### No. 13. RECIT.\* Hamor.

I go: my soul, inspir'd by thy command,  
Thirsts for the battle. I'm already crown'd  
With the victorious wreath; and thou, fair prize  
More worth than fame or conquest, thou art mine

#### No. 14. DUET.\*

These labours past, how happy we I  
How glorious will they prove!  
When gathering fruit from conquest's tree  
We deck the feast of love!

#### No. 15. 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 darksome night.  
Strange ardour fires Illy breast; my arms seem strung  
With tenfold vigour, 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.

#### No. 16 RECIT. ACCOMPANIED

If, Lord, sustain'd by thy almighty pow'r,  
Ammon I drive, and his insulting hands,  
From these our long, un-cultivated lands,  
And safe return a glorious conquer;  
What, or whoe'er shall first salute mine eyes,  
Shall be forever thine, or fall a sacrifice

#### No. 17. RECIT.

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

**No. 18. CHORUS.**

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

**No. 19. RECIT. Storge.**

Some dire event hangs o'er our heads,  
Some woeful song we have to sing  
In misery extreme. O, never, never  
Was my foreboding mind distress'd before  
With such incessant pangs.

**No. 20. AIR.**

Scenes of horror, scenes of woe,  
Rising from the shades below,  
Add new terror to the night.  
While in the never-ceasing pain,  
That attends the servile chain,  
Joyless flow the hours of light.

**No. 21. RECIT. Iphis.**

Say, my dear mother, whence these piercing cries  
That force me, like a frightened 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 pray'rs.

**No. 22 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.

**No. 23. 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;  
Dependant on the light of Israel's God!

**No. 24 CHORUS.**

When his loud voice ill 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 contract their boist'rous pride,  
And lash with idle rage the laughing strand

**Part the Second.****No. 25. RECIT. Hamor.**

Glad tidings of great joy to thee, dear Iphis,  
and to the house of Israel, I bring.  
Thus then in brief: both armies in array  
Of battle rang'd, our general stept forth,  
And offer'd haughty Ammon terms of peace\*  
Most just and righteous; these with scorn refus'd,  
He bade the trumpet sound: but scarce a sword  
Was ting'd in hostile blood, ere all around  
The thund'ring heavens open'd, and pour'd forth  
Thousands of armed cherubim. When straight  
Our general cried: "This is thy signal, Lord;  
I follow thee, and thy bright heavenly host."  
Then rushing on proud Ammon, all aghast.  
He made a bloody slaughter, and pursued  
The Hying foe, till night bade sheath the sword,  
And taste the joys of victory and peace.

**No. 26. CHORUS.**

Cherub and Seraphim, unbodied forms,  
The messengers of fate,  
His dread command await;  
Of swifter flight, and subtler flame,  
Than lightning's winged flame,  
They ride on whirlwinds, directing the storms.

**No. 27. AIR.\* Hamor.**

Up the dreadful steep ascending,  
While for fame and love contending,  
Sought I thee, my glorious prize.  
And now, happy in the blessing,  
Thee, my sweetest joy, possessing,  
Other honours I despise.

**No. 28. RECIT. Iphis.**

'Tis well. Haste, ye maidens, and in richest robes,  
Adorn me, like a stately bride, to meet  
My father in triumphant pomp.  
And while around the dancing banners play,

**No. 29. AIR.**

Tune the soft melodious lute,  
Pleasant harp, and warbling flute,  
To sounds of rapt'rous joy,  
Such as on our solemn days,  
Singing great Jehovah's praise,  
The holy choir employ.

**No. 30. RECIT. Zebul.**

Again heav'n smiles on his repentant people;  
And victory spreads wide her silver wings,  
To soothe our sorrows with a peaceful calm.

**No. 31. AIR.**

Freedom now once more possessing,  
Peace shall spread with ev'ry blessing  
Triumphant joy around;  
Sion now no more complaining  
Shall, in blissful plenty reigning,  
Thy glorious praise resound.

**No. 32. RECIT. Jephtha.**

Zebul, thy deeds were valiant, nor less thine  
My Hamor; but the glory is the Lord's

**No. 33. AIR.**

His mighty arm, with sudden blow,  
 Dispers'd and quell'd the haughty foe;  
 They fell before him, as when through the sky  
 He bids the sweeping winds in vengeance fly

**No. 34. CHORUS.**

In glory high, in might serene,  
 He sees, moves all, unmov'd, unseen.  
 His mighty arm, with sudden blow,  
 Dispers'd and quell'd the haughty foe.

**No. 35. SYMPHONY. \*****No. 36. RECIT. Iphis.**

Hail, glorious conqueror! much lov'd father, hail!  
 Behold thy daughter, and her virgin train,  
 Come to salute thee with all duteous love.

**No. 37. AIR.**

Welcome as the cheerful light,  
 Driving darkest shades of night  
 Welcome as the spring that rains  
 Sweets and plenty o'er the plains  
     Not cheerful day,  
     Nor springs so gay,  
 Such mighty blessings brings,  
 As peace on her triumphant wings.

**No. 38. SEMI-CHORUS of Virgins.**

Welcome thou whose deeds conspire  
 To provoke the warbling lyre.  
 Welcome thou, whom God ordain'd  
 Guardian angel of our land!  
 Thou wert born. his glorious name  
 And great wonders to proclaim.

**No. 39. RECIT. Jephtha.**

Horror! confusion! harsh this music grates  
 Upon my tasteless ears. Begone, my child;  
 Thou hast undone thy father. Fly, begone,  
 And leave me to the rack of wild despair!

**No. 40. AIR.**

Open thy marble jaws, O tomb!  
 And hide me, earth, in thy dark womb:  
 Ere I the name of father stain,  
 And deepest woe from conquest gain.

**No. 41. RECIT. Zebul.**

Why is my brother thus afflicted? say,  
 Why didst thou spurn thy daughter's gratulations,  
 And fling her from thee with unkind disdain?

Jephtha

O Zebul, Hamor, and my dearest wife;  
 Behold A wretched man;  
 Thrown from the summit of presumptions joy,  
 Down to the lowest depth of misery  
 Know, then! I vow'd the first I saw should fall  
 A victim to the living God. My daughter.  
 Alas! it was my daughter! and she dies.

**No. 42. RECIT. ACCOMPANIED. Storge.**

First perish thou! and perish all the world!  
 Hath heav'n then bless'd us with this only pledge  
 Of all our love, this one dear child, for thee  
 To be her murderer? No, cruel man;

AIR.

Let other creatures die,  
 Or heav'n. earth, seas, and sky,  
 In one confusion lie,  
 Ere in a daughter's blood,  
 So fair, so chaste, so good,  
 A father's hand's embrued.

**No. 43. RECIT. Hamor.**

If such thy cruel purpose: lo! your friend  
 Offers himself a willing sacrifice,  
 To save the innocent and beauteous maid.

**No. 44. AIR.**

On me let blind mistaken zeal  
     Her utmost rage employ;  
 'Twill be a mercy there to kill  
     Where life can taste no joy.

**No. 45. QUARTETTO.**

Zeb. O spare thy daughter.  
 Sto. Spare my child,  
 Ham. My love.  
 Jep. Recorded stands my vow in heav'n above.  
 Sto. Recall the impious vow, ere 'tis too late:  
 Ham. \* And think not heav'n delights  
 Zeb. \* In Moloch's horrid rites.  
 Jep. I'll hear no more; her doom is fix'd as fate

**No. 46. RECIT. Iphis.**

Such news flies swiftly; I've heard the mournful cause  
 Of all your sorrows. Of my father's vow,  
 Heav'n spoke its approbation by success .  
 Jephtha hath triumph'd. Israel is free!

**No. 47. RECIT. ACCOMPANIED.**

For joys so vast, too little is the price  
 Of one poor life but oh I accept it, heav'n  
 A grateful victim, and thy blessings still  
 Pour on my country, friends, and dearest father

**No. 48. AIR.**

Happy they: this vital breath  
     With content I shall resign;  
     And not murmur, or repine,  
 Sinking in the arms of death.

**No. 49. RECIT. ACCOMPANIED. Jephtha**

Deeper, and deeper still, thy goodness, child,  
 Pierceth a father's bleeding heart, and checks  
 The cruel sentence on my falt'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,  
 Doom'd by a father! Yes the vow is past,  
 And Gilead hath triumphed o'er his foes.  
 Therefore, tomorrow's dawn I can no more.

**No. 50. CHORUS.**

How dark, O Lord, are thy decrees I  
 All hid from mortal sight!  
 All our joys to sorrow turning,  
 And our triumphs into mourning,  
 As the night succeeds the day.  
 No certain bliss,  
 No solid peace,  
 We mortals know,  
 On earth below-  
 Yet on this maxim still obey.  
 Whatever is, is right.

**Part the Third.****No. 51. RECIT. ACCOMPANIED Jephtha.**

Hide thou thy hated beams, O sun, in clouds  
 And darkness, deep as is a father's woe.

**No. 52. RECIT.**

A father, offering up his only child  
 In vow'd return for victory and peace,

**No. 53. AIR.**

Waft her, angels, through the skies,  
 Far above yon azure plain;  
 Glorious there, like you, to rise,  
 There, like you, for ever reign.

**No. 54. RECIT. ACCOMPANIED 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

**No. 55. 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.

**No. 56. CHORUS of Priests**

Doubtful fear, and reverent awe,  
 Strike us, Lord, while here we bow;  
 Check'd by thy all-sacred law,  
 Yet commanded by the vow.  
 In this distress, Lord, hear our pray'r,  
 And thy determin'd will declare.

**No. 57. SINFONIA.\*****No. 58. RECIT. Angel.**

Rise, Jephtha. and, ye reverend priests, withhold  
 The slaught'rous hand. No vow can disannul  
 The law of God, Nor such was its 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 an holocaust to God.  
 The holy spirit, that dictated thy vow,  
 Bade thus explain it, and approves your faith.

**No. 59. AIR.**

Happy, Iphis, shalt thou live;  
 While to thee the virgin choir  
 Tune their harps of golden wire,  
 And their yearly tribute give.  
 Happy, Iphis, all thy days  
 (Pure, angelic, virgin state)  
 Shalt thou live; and ages late  
 Crown thee with immortal praise.

**No. 60. RECIT. Jephtha.**

For ever blessed be thy holy name  
 Lord God of Israel!

**No. 61. CHORUS.**

Theme sublime of endless praise,  
 Just and righteous are thy ways;  
 And thy mercies still endure,  
 Ever faithful ever sure

**No. 62. RECIT. Zebul.**

Let me congratulate this happy turn,  
 My honour'd brother, judge of Israel;  
 Thy faith, thy courage, constancy, and truth,  
 Nations shall sing; and in their just applause,  
 All join to celebrate thy daughter's name.

**No. 63. AIR.**

Land 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.

**No. 64. RECIT. Storge.**

O let me fold thee in a mother's arms,  
 And with submissive joy, my child, receive  
 Thy designation to life of heav'n.

**No. 65. 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 possess'd,  
 Such is kind Heaven's decree  
 That hath thy parents bless'd  
 In blessing thee.

**No. 66. RECIT. Hamor.**

With transport, Iphis, I behold thy safety,  
 But must for ever mourn so dear a loss:  
 Dear, tho' great Jephtha were to honour me  
 Still with the name of son.

**No. 67. AIR.\***

'Tis heaven's all-ruling power  
 That checks the rising sigh;  
 Yet let me still adore,  
 And think an angel by,  
 While thus each charm and beauteous line,  
 With more than human lustre shine

**No. 68. RECIT. Iphis.**

My faithful Hamor, may that Providence.  
 Which gently claims, or forces our submission  
 Direct thee to some happier choice.

**No. 69. AIR.**

Freely I to heav'n resign,  
All that is in Hamor mine  
Joys triumphant crown thy days,  
And thy name eternal praise.  
Great the bliss assigned to me,  
Greater still attend on thee.

**No. 70. QUINTETTO.**

Iphis.  
All that is in Hamor mine,  
Freely I to heav'n resign.

Hamor.  
All that is in Iphis mine,  
Freely I to heav'n resign.

Iphis.  
Duteous to the will supreme.  
Still my Hamor I'll esteem.

Hamor.  
Duteous t-I Almighty pow r,  
Still my Iphis I'll adore.

Stooge Jephtha Zebul.  
Joys triumphant crown thy days,  
And thy name eternal praise.

**No. 71. CHORUS.**

Ye house of Gilead. with one voice,  
In blessings manifold rejoice:  
    Freed from war's destructive sword,  
Peace her plenty round shall spread,  
While in virtue's path ye tread.  
    So blest are they who fear the Lord  
        Hallelujah. Amen