



Georg Friedrich Haendel

(1685 - 1759)

Israel in Egypt (HWV 54)

Israël en Égypte est un oratorio en trois parties. Le texte en anglais est intégralement tiré des Saintes Écritures ; l'oratorio comprend une proportion inusitée de parties chorales. Il y a très peu d'arias et de récitatifs. Quant à la musique, elle provient de très nombreux emprunts, soit à d'autres compositions de Haendel, soit à des œuvres d'autres musiciens notamment Alessandro Stradella, Johann Kaspar Kerll, Francesco Antonio Urlo, Dionigi Erba.

C'est un texte extrait de la Bible du roi Jacques. Il décrit la sortie d'Égypte du peuple d'Israël, les plaies d'Égypte (les grenouilles, la peste, la grêle, etc.), la traversée de la Mer Rouge (avec l'engloutissement des armées du Pharaon) et les hymnes de reconnaissance d'Israël envers son Dieu.

Texte : extrait de la Bible : Exodus I, II, XV et Psaumes 105 et 106.

Première représentation : le 4 avril 1739 au King's Theatre à Londres

Argument

L'oratorio raconte, dans une succession de tableaux, l'histoire de la libération du peuple juif du joug égyptien.

Partie I

La version originelle employait, pour la première partie, la totalité de l'hymne funéraire The ways of Zion do mourn HWV264, composée en 1737 en faveur des obsèques de la reine Caroline d'Ansbach.

En fait, à la suite du refus du roi George II qui voulait privilégier l'hymne, Haendel dut modifier le texte. D'où, la composition musicale est tout à fait identique entre les deux œuvres hormis le texte.

Les paroles se composent des extraits de la Bible du roi Jacques, adaptés aux funéraires. En 1758, cette première partie fut remplacée par d'autres pièces, à la suite de la proposition de son disciple John Christopher Smith. Devenu aveugle, Haendel aurait dû accepter, malgré lui, cette modification.

De nos jours, au contraire, l'ancienne première partie fut rétablie, en raison de sa qualité.

Partie II

La deuxième partie est la figuration des chapitres 1 à 14 du Livre de l'Exode relatant la sortie d'Égypte des Israélites.

On annonce qu'un nouveau pharaon vient de monter sur le trône d'Égypte et qu'il est beaucoup moins favorable aux Juifs que son prédécesseur. Dieu choisit Moïse pour conduire son peuple loin de son lieu d'esclavage.

Une série de malheurs (les « dix plaies d'Égypte ») s'abattent sur le pays pour fléchir la volonté du pharaon d'empêcher les Israélites de partir : l'eau des rivières est changée en sang ; le pays est envahi de grenouilles ; des nuées de moustiques attaquent bêtes et gens ; des myriades de mouches s'introduisent partout ; tous les troupeaux des Égyptiens meurent ; bêtes et gens sont couverts de furoncles ; une grêle de feu tombe sur le pays ; des nuages de sauterelles dévastent toutes les plantes ; de profondes ténèbres s'établissent sur le pays ; enfin, tous les premiers-nés des Égyptiens meurent, enfants comme animaux.

Pharaon finit par autoriser le départ des Israélites, mais se ravise bientôt et les poursuit avec son armée. Moïse étendant sa main fait s'écarter les eaux de la Mer Rouge mais celles-ci retombent et engloutissent l'armée des Égyptiens qui sont tous noyés.

Partie III

Les Israélites célèbrent enfin leur délivrance.

Une suite de chœurs d'allégresse est incluse dans cette troisième partie, l'œuvre se terminant par un solo de soprano et le chœur proclamant que « le Seigneur régnera à jamais » et qu'« il a englouti cheval et cavalier ».

Le texte est basé sur le Cantique de la mer, également tiré du Livre de l'Exode.

Texte

L'action a pour cadre la conquête de Chypre par Richard Cœur de Lion en 1191.

Partie I - THE LAMENTATION OF THE ISRAELITES FOR THE DEATH OF JOSEPH

1. SYMPHONY

2. CHORUS

The sons of Israel do mourn, and they are in bitterness; all the people sigh, and hang down their heads to the ground.

3. CHORUS

How is the mighty fall'n! He that was great among the princes, and ruler of the provinces!

4. CHORUS

He put on righteousness, and it clothed him; his judgment was a robe and a diadem.

5. SOLI & CHORUS

When the ear heard him, then it blessed him, and when the eye saw him, it gave witness of him

6. CHORUS

How is the mighty fall'n! He that was great among the princes, and ruler of the provinces!

7. CHORUS

He deliver'd the poor that cried, the fatherless, and him that had none to help him. Kindness, meekness and comfort were in his tongue; if there was any virtue, and if there was any praise, he thought on those things.

8. CHORUS

How are the mighty fall'n. He that was great, great among the nations, and prince of the provinces!

9. SOLI & CHORUS

The righteous shall be had in everlasting remembrance, and the wise will shine as the brightness of the firmament

10. CHORUS

Their bodies are buried in peace, but their name liveth evermore.

11. CHORUS

The people will tell of their wisdom, and the congregation will shew forth their praise; their reward also is with the lord, and the care of them is with the Most High.

12. SOLI

They shall receive a glorious kingdom and a beautiful crown from the Lord's hand

13. CHORUS

The merciful goodness of the lord endureth for ever on them that fear him, and his righteousness on children's children.

Partie II - EXODUS

RECITATIVE (Tenor)

Now there arose a new king over Egypt which knew not Joseph; and he set over Israel taskmasters to afflict them with burthens, and they made them serve with rigour.

14. SOLO and CHORUS (Alto)

And the children of Israel sigh'd by reason of the bondage, and their cry came up unto God. They oppress'd them with burthens, and made them serve with rigour; and their cry came up unto God.

RECITATIVE (Tenor)

Then sent He Moses, His servant, and Aaron whom He had chosen; these shew'd His signs among them, and wonders in the land of Ham. He turned their waters into blood.

15. CHORUS

They loathed to drink of the river. He turned their waters into blood.

16. AIR (Alto)

Their land brought forth frogs, yea, even in their king's chambers. He gave their cattle over to the pestilence; blotches and blains broke forth on man and beast.

17. CHORUS

He spake the word, and there came all manner of flies and lice in all their quarters. He spake; and the locusts came without number, and devour'd the fruits of their ground.

18. CHORUS

He gave them hailstones for rain; fire mingled with the hail ran along upon the ground.

19. CHORUS

He sent a thick darkness over all the land, even darkness which might be felt.

20. CHORUS

He smote all the first-born of Egypt, the chief of all their strength.

21. CHORUS

But as for His people, He led them forth like sheep: He brought them out with silver and gold; there was not one feeble person among their tribes.

22. CHORUS

Egypt was glad when they departed, for the fear of them fell upon them.

23. CHORUS

He rebuked the Red Sea, and it was dried up. He led them through the Deep as through a wilderness. But the waters overwhelmed their enemies, there was not one of them left.

24. CHORUS

And Israel saw that great work that the lord did upon th'Egyptians; and the people feared the lord, and believed the lord and His servant Moses.

Partie II - MOSES' SONG

25. CHORUS/INTROITUS

Moses and the children of Israel sung this song unto the Lord, and spake, saying: I will sing unto the lord, for He hath triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider hath He thrown into the sea.

26. DUET (Sopranos)

The lord is my strength and my song; He is become my salvation.

27. CHORUS

He is my God, and I will prepare Him an habitation: my father's God, and I will exalt Him.

28. DUET (Basses)

The lord is a man of war: lord is His name. Pharaoh's chariots and his host hath He cast into the sea; his chosen captains also are drowned in the Red Sea.

29. CHORUS

The depths have cover'd them, they sunk into the bottom as a stone.

30. CHORUS

Thy right hand, O Lord, is become glorious in power; Thy right hand, O Lord, hath dashed in pieces the enemy. And in the greatness of Thine excellency, Thou hast overthrown them that rose up against Thee. Thou sentest forth Thy wrath, which consumed them as stubble.

31. CHORUS

And with the blast of Thy nostrils the waters were gathered together, the floods stood upright as an heap, and the depths were congealed in the heart of the sea.

32. AIR (tenor)

The enemy said, I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil; my lust shall be satisfied upon them; I will draw my sword, my hand shall destroy them.

33. AIR (Soprano)

Thou didst blow with the wind, the sea cover'd them; they sank as lead in the mighty waters.

34. CHORUS

Who is like unto Thee, O Lord, among the Gods? Who is like Thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders? Thou stretchest out Thy right hand, the earth swallow'd them.

35. DUET (Alto, Tenor)

Thou in Thy mercy hast led forth Thy people which Thou hast redeemed; Thou hast guided them in Thy strength unto Thy holy habitation.

36. CHORUS

The people shall hear, and be afraid: sorrow shall take hold on them: all the inhabitants of Canaan shall melt away: by the greatness of Thy arm they shall be as still as a stone; till Thy people pass over, O Lord, which Thou hast purchased

37. AIR (Alto)

Thou shalt bring them in, and plant them in the mountain of Thine inheritance, in the place, O Lord, which Thou hast made for Thee to dwell in, in the sanctuary, O lord, which Thy hands have established.

38. CHORUS

The lord shall reign for ever and ever.

RECITATIVE (Tenor)

For the horse of Pharaoh went in with his chariots and with his horsemen into the sea, and the lord brought again the waters of the sea upon them; but the children of Israel went on dry land in the midst of the sea.

38. CHORUS (da capo)

The lord shall reign for ever and ever.

RECITATIVE (Tenor)

And Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a timbrel in her hand; and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances. And Miriam answered them:

39. SOLO (Soprano) and CHORUS

Sing ye to the lord, for He hath triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider hath He thrown into the sea. The lord shall reign for ever and ever. I will sing unto the Lord, for He hath triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider hath He thrown into the sea.