

1. Guide me, O Thou great Jehovah,

Pilgrim through this barren land.

I am weak, but Thou art mighty;

Hold me with Thy powerful hand.

Bread of Heaven, Bread of Heaven,

Feed me till I want no more;

Feed me till I want no more.

2. Open now the crystal fountain,

Whence the healing stream doth flow;

Let the fire and cloudy pillar lead me all my journey through.

Strong deliverer, strong deliverer,

Be Thou still my strength and shield;

Be Thou still my strength and shield.

A prayer – Guide me because this land isn't pleasant. Guide me because I am weak. Hold me with your hand because it is so strong that nobody can fight against you. With this, Williams could have been looking at his own life or the trials of the Israelites. Bread of heaven – reference to the manna in the dessert but also direct reference to Jesus the bread of life, feed me because only you can satisfy.

In this verse we get powerful imagery from the Exodus story. The crystal fountain (Exodus 17:6) allowed the people of Israel to drink rather than die of thirst. The fire and cloudy pillar (Exodus 17:21) references the fire and the cloud that the people of Israel followed to lead them out of the dessert. Williams then brings it back to us today with strong deliverer be though still my strength and shield – protect me as you did the people of Israel. Williams is saying God, you sustained the people of Israel, now please sustain me in all my troubles.

3. When I tread the verge of Jordan,
Bid my anxious fears subside;
Death of deaths, and hell's destruction,
Land me safe on Canaan's side.
Songs of praises, songs of praises,
I will ever give to Thee;
I will ever give to Thee.

Literal Welsh translation of the last verse:

When I go through Jordan - Cruel death in its force - Thou Thyself suffered this before, Why shall I fear further? Victory! Let me cry out in the torrent.

The hymn ends in climactic fashion with the Hebrew people finally reaching their destination after forty years of wandering in the desert (Joshua 3:9-6:17). This stanza references the book of Joshua with the crossing of the river "Jordan" and the arrival at Canaan. The final lines conclude with exuberance, as the "people of Israel" sing of victory to their Redeemer and Provider. Just as the people of Israel had to cross the river Jordan to get to the promised land, we today have to cross the "final river" as John Bunyan called it, to heaven. That is death. So when I have to cross the river of death, Lord, don't let me be anxious. And as Christians we have no reason to be anxious because we know that God is there. Land me safe on Canaan's side – land me safe in heaven where I will sing your praises forever more.

William Williams of Pantycelyn

William Williams was born at Cefn-coed farm in the parish of Llanfair-ar-y-bryn, near the town of Llandovery (Llanymddyfri), in 1717, the son of John and Dorothy Williams. His father died in 1742, resulting in his mother later moving to the nearby farm of Pantycelyn ("Holly Hollow"). The family were Nonconformists (in other words, they didn't conform to the ways of the Anglican Church). William Williams was educated locally and then at a nonconformist academy near Talgarth.

He had intended to become a doctor, but this changed in 1737/38, when he was converted by the preaching of the evangelical Methodist revivalist Howell Harris in Talgarth.

William Williams felt called to the priesthood; and in 1740, despite his family's links with the Nonconformist branch of Christianity, he took deacon's orders in the Established Anglican Church. (Since disestablishment in 1920, the Anglican church in Wales has been known as the Church in Wales.)

His first appointment was as curate to Theophilus Evans (1693–1767) in the parishes of Llanwrtyd, Llanfihangel Abergwesyn and Llanddewi Abergwesyn. Around this time he became involved in the Methodist movement and in June 1742 his disapproving parishioners reported his activities to the Archdeacon's Court in Brecon. Methodism was originally a reformist faction within the Church of England and was not intended to be a separatist movement or church. It was nevertheless seen as a threat to the Anglican establishment and in 1743, when Williams duly applied for ordination as a priest, his application was refused because of his Methodist connexion. His choice was between a comfortable but conformist career in the Anglican Church or the financially precarious, but perhaps spiritually richer life of a Methodist preacher outside of the Church. He chose the latter.

Where John Wesley remained an Anglican all of his life, his brother and fellow founder of Methodism went his own separate way. Charles Wesley had held many of the views held by John Calvin and these were seen as incompatible with the Anglican Church. Welsh Methodism leaned towards the Calvinistic thinking of Charles Wesley rather than the more Anglican way of thinking held by John Wesley.

Williams Pantycelyn managed to support his ministry travelling through Wales as a preacher by selling tea. He is known not just as a great preacher, but as the "mouth piece" of the Welsh Methodist revival of the 18th Century.

