

"God Be With You " — a hymn study

"The Lord watch between me and thee, when we are absent one from another" (Gen. 31:49).

by Wayne S. Walker

Introduction:

1. A song which expresses the aspiration of God's people for the Lord to watch over them is "God Be With You." (#512 in Hymns for Worship Revised) The text was written by Jeremiah Eames Rankin (1828-1904). Minister with the First Congregational Church of Washington, D. C., he was wanting a song for the conclusion of his Sunday night prayer meetings. Finding none that satisfied him, he decided to write one. When he looked up the word "good-by" in the dictionary, he found that it said, **"A condensation of `God be with you.'" Based on this, he produced the first stanza, as a "Christian good-by," and sent it to two men to provide music. This was in 1880.**

2. The tune (Endeavor, Farewell, Till We Meet, or Deus Vobiscum) which Rankin chose was composed by William Gould Tomer (1833-1896). A total stranger to Rankin, he was music director of the Grace Methodist Episcopal Church in Washington and also a government clerk. After receiving Tomer's tune, Rankin gave it to his own music director, J. W. Bischoff, who made some minor changes. The author then added four other stanzas and a chorus. The song was first published in the 1880 (some sources say 1883) compilation "Gospel Bells," edited by Rankin, Bischoff, and Otis F. Presbrey for the Western Sunday School Publishing Co. of Chicago, IL. This has been the most popular closing hymn originating in the United States.

I. Stanza 1 Asks That God Go With Us To Watch Over And Uphold Us

"By His counsels guide uphold you, With His sheep securely fold you"

- A. God has promised to watch over and care for His people as a shepherd securely folds His sheep, Psalm 100:1-3.
- B. One hymnbook that has had wide acceptance among brethren, in which this hymn was probably cut and pasted from some other source, read, "By His COUNCILS guide, uphold you." This was probably a case of mistaken identity, but there is a difference between the two words. God's counsels by which He guides us are His revelations in scripture, Psalm 107:10-11.
- C. Thus, the stanza is a prayer that God will be with us to direct us in life, Romans 15:33.

II. Stanza 2 Asks That God Go With Us To Protect Us As A Mother Bird Would Her Babies

"Neath His wings protecting hide you, Daily manna still provide you"

- A. God is sometimes pictured as hiding His children in the shadow of His wings:,Psalm 36:7.
- B. Just as God provided manna in the wilderness for the people of Israel, so we look to Him to provide the spiritual manna or bread that our souls need to feed upon, John 6.30-35.
- C. Hence, the stanza is a prayer that God will be with us to provide for our spiritual needs, just as Jesus wanted to do for the city of Jerusalem, Matthew 23.37.

III. Stanza 3 Asks That God Go With Us To Keep His Banner Of Love Floating Over Us

"Keep love's banner floating o'er you, Put His arms unafailing 'round you"

- A. Keeping a banner over one is a sign of possession, just as the Shunemite lass declared here commitment to her betrothed, Song of Solomon 2.
- B. Only by marching beneath the banner of the Lord can we expect to be delivered from the threatening wave of death, Psalm 60:4-5.
- C. Therefore, the stanza is a prayer that we might have the banner of God's love to be over us wherever we go, 2 Corinthians 13:14.

The chorus repeats the main idea of the song, that God be with us in all of our lives.

"Till we meet, till we meet, Tell we meet at Jesus' feet. Till we meet, till we meet, God be with you till we meet again."

No finer farewell can be expressed by Christians to one another as they leave a place of worship than the sincere wish that ***"God Be With You."***