

## Dark Was The Night Cold Was The Ground

Written by bluesever  
Sunday, 26 May 2013 22:58 -

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### Dark Was The Night Cold Was The Ground

In 1977 Carl Sagan and a team of researchers were tasked with collecting a representation of Earth and the human experience for sending on the Voyager probe to other life forms in the universe. They collected sounds of frogs, crickets, volcanoes, a human heartbeat, laughter, greetings in 55 languages, and 27 pieces of music on the Voyager Golden Record. **"Dark Was the Night, Cold Was the Ground"**

was included, according to Sagan, because

*"Johnson's song concerns a situation he faced many times: nightfall with no place to sleep. Since humans appeared on Earth, the shroud of night has yet to fall without touching a man or woman in the same plight."*

### Dark Was The Night Cold Was The Ground

**"Dark Was the Night, Cold Was the Ground"** is a gospel-blues song written and performed by Blind Willie Johnson and recorded probably in December 1927.



### Blind Willie Johnson

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**Blind Willie Johnson** was born in 1897 near Brenham, Texas. Johnson was not born blind. When Willie was seven his father beat his stepmother after catching her going out with another man. According to this account, the stepmother then blinded young Willie by throwing lye in his face.

As he got older, Johnson began earning money by playing his guitar, one of the few avenues left to a blind man to earn a living. Instead of a bottleneck, Johnson actually played slide with a pocketknife.



### Dark Was the Night, Cold Was the Ground, singel, 1927

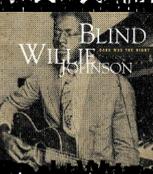
Regardless of his excellent blues technique and sound, Johnson didn't want to be a bluesman, for he was a passionate believer in the Bible. So, he began singing the gospel and interpreting Negro spirituals. He became a Baptist preacher and brought his sermons and music to the streets of the surrounding cities.

Although revered by folk and rock artists like Bob Dylan, Eric Clapton, and Led Zeppelin, seldom does Blind Willie Johnson's name come up in conversation when people talk about the giants of the blues. One reason for this, perhaps, is that Johnson's songs hewed closer to the gospel roots of the blues than those of his musical contemporaries. Another reason for Johnson's relative obscurity was his personal struggle for salvation that would cause him to turn his back on "the devil's music."

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