



# #4 in “A Story to Tell Series” 1 The Wilderness

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Jesus came to be the savior of the world, but why did he spend the first 30 years of his life doing nothing?

- There were people to heal!
- Scriptures to teach!
- Miracles to perform!

All of us who are called to preach, teach, and serve others feel the same way from time to time.

- “I can’t wait another five years!
- I have so much to teach!
- So many ideas!
- There are so many people all around me who need to hear the Gospel.
- I’ve got books to write,
- minds to change,
- people to serve!

For some people, that may be true. Maybe God does want you to get out there and get to work right away.

But I think that for most of us, including Jesus (and Joseph, Moses, David, Paul, etc), there is something God does in our lives during the “back burner” years that cannot be accomplished any other way.

## I. Jesus Entered a World full of Darkness.



Today, we will consider several aspects of the darkness, aspects not out of God's control, but in God's plan so that Christ's light would radiate all the more brilliantly.

### 3 1. God had been silent for four centuries.

- Malachi is the last book in the Old Testament, written in the fifth century BC.
- It concludes with the statement that God would send Elijah the prophet as a forerunner for the Messiah.
- But since that last pregnant statement, which would eventually be fulfilled in John the Baptist, God had been silent.
- And everyone knew it.

#### **Some of the Jewish writers of the day.**

- Babylonian Talmud, Yomah 9b: *'After the latter prophets Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi had died, the Holy Spirit departed from Israel, but they still availed themselves of the voice from heaven'*
- Josephus, Against Apion: *'From Artaxerxes to our own times a complete history has been written, but has not been deemed worthy of equal credit with the earlier records, because of the failure of the exact succession of the prophets'*
- 1 Maccabees: *'So they tore down the altar and stored the stones in a convenient place on the temple hill until there should come a prophet to tell what to do with them.'*

**Without the word of God present among them, the people walked in spiritual darkness.**

### 4 2. Israel was under the oppressive rule of Rome.

This is evident in the birth story of Jesus. Luke 2:1 records the census taken up by Caesar Augustus.

- It was a blatant reminder that the people of Israel were owned by another.
- Herod, a descendent of Edom, ruled in Jerusalem.
- Long gone were the days of a Davidic king.



- Soldiers walked the streets of Jerusalem.

**In some ways, Israel had escaped exile.** But in many ways, they were exiles in their own country.

- Even their own temple was built by a foreigner—Herod the Great was a descendent of a rival nation.
- Political darkness reigned!

## 5 3. The nation of Israel was fracturing.

**Four groups in Israel sought and fought to lead the people.**

(1) The Pharisees resided in Jerusalem. They attempted to shape religious life in Israel through their traditions. Jesus had many run-ins with these legalistic Jews, who led astray the people of God (cf. Matt 23).

(2) Sadducees opposed the strict legalism of the Pharisees, and only embraced Moses law (Gen-Deut). They rejected the resurrection, belief in angels, but still had a influential place in the temple and law courts.

(3) The Essenes, who lived in a commune near Qumran—they were the scribes who penned and preserved the Dead Sea Scrolls—lived an especially pure life. They devoted themselves to God, and prayed for God's overthrow of Rome.

(4) The Zealots were a band of brothers who did not pray for change so much as they sought violent means of overthrowing Roman rule.

The result of these four competing sects in Judaism led to constant friction, only increased by the oppressive rule of Rome. Riots were common. Tension was unceasing. Darkness permeated Judaism.

## 6 4. Freedom and Rights were limited.

As an illustration think about the census that brought Mary and Joseph to Jerusalem.

- Living in Nazareth, Mary and Joseph lived more than 100 miles North of Bethlehem.
- They were forced by legal constraint to make the arduous trip.



- Without a highway, a car, a cushioned seat, or a suspension system;

## 7 5. Most people in Israel were very poor.

The poverty of Mary and Joseph did not fit the royalty.

Not only were the conditions leading up to Christ's birth dark, so too was his birth.

Luke 2:7 records that there was "no place for them in the inn."

- This is probably because it was filled up with travelers coming for the census;
- But it may also be the case that Joseph, a carpenter by trade, did not have the means to pay for or to pay extra for a room. Money talks, right?
- But it is clear, that Joseph had no bargaining power.
- Mary and Joseph went to the stable, where Jesus was born and laid in a manger.
- Without family or hospitality.

Poverty was not the only source of darkness; persecution followed Jesus' birth, so that he was constantly under threat.

## 8 II. God Sometimes Allows Oppression and Rejection

The hostile forces of Herod, (Satan) tried to kill Jesus. Matthew 2 records the details.

### **Matt 2:1-8.**

- 9 *Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him." When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet: "And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are*



*by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.” Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, “Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him.”*

Herod, so paranoid for his own position and power that he had multiple family members executed, attempts to use the wisemen to lead him to the Christ child—not to worship, but to exterminate.

**10** **Matt 2:16.** *Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, became furious, he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had ascertained from the wise men.*

Wicked men like Herod come to power by God’s permission.

- He allows them to rise to power,
- He does not always stand in their way,
- He does not always stop their acts of monstrous evil.

For some people, this poses an enormous problem, we all can see that wrongdoers not only prosper, sometimes they prosper in the midst of their bloodthirsty activities.

The prophet Jeremiah grappled with the issue when he asked the Lord:

**11** **Jeremiah 12:1–2**  
*“Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why do all the faithless live at ease? You have planted them, and they have taken root; they grow and bear fruit. You are always on their lips but far from their hearts” .*

Job struggled similarly:

**12** **Job 21:7**  
*“Why do the wicked live on, growing old and increasing in power?”*

And the psalmist expressed envy when he saw the prosperity of the wicked, wondering if living righteously was worth the trouble. How does a holy God of love allow His people to suffer while the wicked thrive?



Perhaps a better question is, why are we tempted to envy the wicked?

- As God's children, what lies at the heart of our inquiry?
- Why are we upset when an evil person does well?
- Is it because that person has something we do not?

The wicked may prosper in this world, but perhaps we've forgotten that their fortune will only endure for the short term.

- It is a great mystery why God permits evil men to do evil, hurting others in the process, apparently unchecked.
- Things are rarely what they seem to be.
- No one gets away with sin forever.
- There is a road that seems right to a man, but the road of evil leads only to death.
- Your sin finds you out in the end. Herod died eventually, and then he faced his Creator.

## 13 III. Living in Exile

**Matthew 2:13-15**

14 *Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him." And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, "Out of Egypt I called my son."*

The ways of God rarely make sense to us in moments of great crisis.

- Did Mary wonder about God's plan when she suddenly had to take her baby on a difficult journey across the Sinai Desert to Egypt?
- Did Joseph and Mary discuss it together? We do not know, but we know that Mary was a deep thinker who pondered things in her heart



Egypt occupies a very singular position towards Israel.

- It was often the shelter of God's People.
- Abraham went there when there was a famine in the land of his travels.

**1. Protection** Joseph was taken to Egypt and escaped the death intended for him by his brothers,

**2. Preparation.** The whole family of Jacob went into, and remained there becoming a great nation.

**3. Education** There Moses acquired the learning which was so useful to him.

**God sometimes sent his children to Egypt to protect them, however he always delivered them from Egypt later.**

- Moses and the children of Israel came "out of Egypt" in the great passage through the Red Sea.
- We may find ourselves in Egypt, but we are never meant to stay there forever.

**True greatness waits on God.**

- It does not rush the Lord or complain when things happen slowly or when the plans of life suddenly are overturned.
- By faith we go down to Egypt in the middle of the night, knowing that one day by faith we will come "out of Egypt."
- Both the going and the coming are part of God's plan for us.

*This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, "Out of Egypt I called my son."*

That last verse has caused lots of consternation. Jesus family goes to Egypt, and this somehow fulfills Hosea's reference to Israel's exodus?

It looks like Matthew is connecting the dots by the slimmest of connections.

Here's what we read in:

**Hosea 11:1-4**



*When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. The more they were called, the more they went away; they kept sacrificing to the Baals and burning offerings to idols. Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk; I took them up by their arms, but they did not know that I healed them. I led them with cords of kindness, with the bands of love, and I became to them as one who eases the yoke on their jaws, and I bent down to them and fed them.*

Clearly, Hosea, speaking for the Lord, is harkening back to the Exodus.

- He is remembering when Israel was just a little toddler of a nation and God delivered them out of bondage in Egypt. “Many years ago, by Moses and the plagues and all that,
- I called my son Israel out of Egypt, out of the house of slavery”—that’s what Hosea 11 is about.

### **So how do we make sense of this prophecy in Hosea and fulfillment in Matthew?**

The first step toward understanding Matthew’s purpose is to look more carefully at the word “fulfill.” The Greek word is *pleroō*.

And it simply means to fill up.

- That’s what Matthew is at pains to demonstrate—that Jesus was filling up the Old Testament.
- Sometimes this meant very specifically that the Old Testament predicted the Messiah’s birthplace would be in Bethlehem and Jesus was, in fact, born in Bethlehem.
- That’s fulfillment.
- But fulfillment can be broader than that. It can refer to the filling up of the Old Testament; that is, the bringing to light what previously had been in shadows.

Take Mark 1:14-15, for example. *“Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.’”*

- When Jesus said “the time is fulfilled,” he did not mean “right now a specific prediction of Scripture is coming to pass.”
- He meant, “with my preaching of the gospel, the time has been filled up and the kingdom is here.



- The Old Testament is reaching its climax.”
- I don’t believe Matthew thought Jesus’ flight to Egypt was predicted in Hosea 11:1.
- But I do believe that Matthew thought Jesus’ flight to and return from Egypt was filling up Hosea 11:1.

# 1 CONCLUSION:

## The Good News of Great Darkness

Darkness is everywhere in Christ’s birth, which should not come as a surprise when we think of the prophecies in the Old Testament and the conditions of the world that God created.

As **John 1** says, *“The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world, . . . yet the world did not know him.”*

The reality of Christ’s darkness is not in itself comforting, but when we consider that Christ came into the darkness in order to bring light, the truth is staggering beautiful.

- For we all face seasons of darkness, and God in the flesh knows exactly what that looks like and feels like.

Remembering that the light of Christ came in the darkness of night gives us hope that God can still pour light into our hearts and shine light into our lives.

- No matter how dark it may be,
- no matter where the darkness comes from,
- God is the light who enlightens everyone, and
- He has come to take up residence in the lives of those who look to Christ.

**Jesus is the Only Answer!!**

