

Introduction

Why Faith Factor?

A popular saying I once heard states, “Faith is walking to the edge of all the light that you have—and taking one more step.” And that’s exactly what God is calling you and me to do today. But it’s not a blind leap of faith. God has given us all the light we need, and that light is found in His Word, the Bible. All we need to do is read, understand, and apply God’s Word to our lives. That’s the purpose of this book.

Some of you who are familiar with my former titles, *Caution: Dangerous Devotions* and *Caution: More Dangerous Devotions*, may be wondering, *Are Faith Factor, OT and Faith Factor, NT* different? To that I would say yes! While maintaining the same quality of retelling the biblical text, these two books have been updated and expanded to include more background information, cultural explanations, more sidebars, and, in the case of the companion to this book, the entire Old Testament (rather than just through the book of Psalms). You will also find comparative timeline tidbits that place biblical and secular history side by side, as well as online access to more devotional lessons we simply had no room to squeeze into the books. You can find those lessons online at www.cookministries.com/FaithFactor as well as a convenient topical index for both devotionals.

It’s my prayer that *Faith Factor, OT* and *Faith Factor, NT* will ignite your heart and grow your faith—and may all the glory for that go to God alone.

Walk on!

***The apostles said
to the Lord, “Increase
our faith!”***

***He replied, “If you have
faith as small as a
mustard seed ...”***

(Luke 17:5–6)

***It’s impossible to please
God apart from faith. And
why? Because anyone
who wants to approach
God must believe both
that he exists and that he
cares enough to respond
to those who seek him.***

(Heb. 11:6 MSG)



TIMELINE TIDBITS: Running along the bottom



Matthew

Faith facts

Each book of the Bible was written with a special purpose in mind.

Matthew focuses on the Jewish people in Jesus' day who were familiar with the Old Testament Scriptures and prophecies about a King who would someday come. Over and over Matthew shows how Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies. In fact, Matthew quotes the Old Testament frequently, and the words "so it was fulfilled" appear multiple times. I don't know what you think, but this tells me that Jesus was no ordinary person!

Prophecy is a message telling people what God will do in the future. The prophecies about Jesus were made more than four hundred years before He came!

The first seventeen verses of Matthew may seem quite boring, but they actually show how Jesus came from a royal line. God had it all planned down through the ages to the very last detail. As you read through Matthew, notice how Jesus the King fulfilled prophecy, received God's stamp of approval, proved His strength of character, chose people to follow Him, set new standards with old rules, handed out royal invitations, and encourages us to examine and trust Him. Enjoy your walk through this book.

of this book are Timeline Tidbits,

Said and Done

Taken from Matthew 1—2

Foundation

Just as you prepare yourself each morning before starting your day, so you need to prepare your heart before reading God's Word. The best way to do that is to spend a few minutes in prayer. It doesn't need to be a long prayer—a simple sentence expressing your heartfelt desire to God will do. Each time you read God's Word, ask Him to open your eyes and to teach you.

Focus

Have you ever been amazed when something you were told was going to happen really did happen? How about being told three hundred different things about a person that were going to happen and finding out that each of them came true exactly as foretold? Sound impossible? Not in this case!

Joseph wondered if his situation was a bad dream. *I love Mary. Mary loves me. And we're engaged to be married.* He rehearsed the words over and over in his mind. He knew that neither of them had done anything to be ashamed of. Yet Mary told him she was pregnant. It just didn't make sense! It didn't, at least, until God sent an angel to explain it to Joseph.

"Joseph, don't be alarmed." The angel reassured him. "Mary's baby is from the Holy Spirit and is one of a kind. You are to call Him Jesus, for through Him people will be saved from their sins."



The news stunned Joseph, and his mind raced to the words spoken hundreds of years earlier by the prophet Isaiah: “The virgin shall bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel, meaning ‘God with us.’

“Can it be?” Joseph breathed with wild wonderment.

Many months later when Mary was close to giving birth, the Roman government called for a census of the entire empire (Luke 2:1–3). Since Joseph was a descendant of David, he and Mary were required to make the journey to Bethlehem, Joseph’s ancestral home. In Joseph and Mary’s eyes the timing couldn’t have been worse, but in God’s eyes the timing was perfect. A prophecy in Micah 5:2 said that the Savior would be born in Bethlehem, and that’s exactly what happened.

That night, angels joyfully announced the Savior’s birth to shepherds, telling them to look for specific signs that would prove the truth of their words. When the shepherds came to the stable, they fell to their knees in worship. Each and every sign the angels had given them about the baby had been fulfilled! (See Luke 2:8–20.)

Wise men from the East (advisers to kings) noticed an unusual star in the sky as well. Some who were familiar with the Scriptures knew what it meant and began their journey to find the newborn Savior. Upon arriving in Jerusalem several months later, they asked where they might find this newborn King. Hearing about their visit, King Herod became troubled and questioned the wise men about what they had seen. He lied, saying he too wanted to worship the baby and asked the wise men to report back once they had found the One whom they were seeking. The wise men never returned, for

It has been said that the odds of someone fulfilling only eight of the prophecies Jesus fulfilled are the same as blindfolding and asking someone to pick out, on the first try, one specially marked coin from a two-foot-deep pile of coins covering the entire state of Texas!

Herod the Great descended from Esau. To learn why this is so significant, read more about it in Faith Factor OT or straight from the Bible in Genesis 27.

God had warned them in a dream not to go back. This annoyed King Herod, who was jealous and fearful of the baby King the wise men had come to worship.

“All baby boys two years of age and younger are to be killed!” the king angrily decreed.

And so it was done. The great weeping and wailing that rang out in the land fulfilled an Old Testament prophecy from Jeremiah. (See Jeremiah 31:15.) And when Joseph took his family and fled to the neighboring land of Egypt after being warned in a dream, you guessed it, another prophecy was fulfilled—“Out of Egypt I called my son” (Hosea 11:1).

After Herod died, an angel again appeared to Joseph in a dream, telling him to return home—not to Bethlehem but to Nazareth. *Nazareth*? Joseph questioned in his heart, knowing the town housed the Roman garrison for all of northern Galilee. Jews who lived in Nazareth were often looked down upon as “compromisers” who interacted with their Roman enemies. Being called a Nazarene was not a nice thing! Was this the best place for a king to be raised? Obeying the Lord, however, Joseph settled his family in Nazareth—fulfilling more prophecy: “He will be called a Nazarene” (Hosea 11:1). God gave us more than three hundred prophecies in the Old Testament about a Savior who would come to save people from their sins, and each and every one was accomplished through the life of Jesus.

Clearly, Jesus was no ordinary person!

Footwork

Anything worth having usually requires a little effort. In this section you’ll need to use a little energy. But don’t panic! Your Bible is all you’ll need. Just look up the Scripture verses and answer the questions that follow. Doing this will build your spiritual muscles and make you strong in the Lord. Really!

Now turn to Luke 22:67–71 in your Bible. This is one of Jesus’ predictions about Himself as He stood before the religious rulers just before dying on the cross. What did He say?

Do you believe it?



If you could sit down with Jesus and ask Him questions concerning things you might not understand about Him, what would you ask? Write your questions on an index card and tape it to the back inside cover of this devotional. When you've finished your journey through the New Testament, reread your questions and discover how many you're able to answer!

Would You Believe It?

Taken from Matthew 3

Foundation

Take a few minutes to prepare your heart for today's lesson. Ask God to speak to you from His Word.

Focus

Have you ever seen or heard things that caught you totally by surprise?

“What’s this all about?” one person probably whispered to another upon joining the outskirts of the crowd near the Jordan River.

“I’m not quite sure, but let’s move in closer so we can hear what this strangely dressed man is saying!”

John the Baptist was the first true prophet sent by God to the Jewish people in four hundred years. His attire was similar to the prophet Elijah’s from the Old Testament. (Check out 2 Kings 1:8!)

“Repent! God’s kingdom is at hand!” the raspy voice cried out. It belonged to a man named John, who would later be known as John the Baptist. Everything about John was unusual. Instead of living in a tidy little house on the edge of town, John lived in the wilderness. Instead of eating normal food, he ate locusts and wild honey. As for John’s clothes of camel’s hair and leather belt—well, they were practical, sturdy, and as plain looking as the wilderness around him.

John the Baptist claimed to be God’s messenger,



yet he didn't live, talk, or look like a religious leader of his day. He was quite a different type of person!

People came from all over, gathering by the river to hear John's message: "Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand!" Those words were as strange as John's appearance. *Repent* means to turn around, to stop doing or being one thing and to start doing or being another. John was telling the people to stop living a life that ignored the covenant, or agreement, God had made with them—a covenant that stated how they could live in a relationship with Him and one day worship before His throne in heaven.

Some of the listeners who gathered at the water's edge no doubt wondered if John the Baptist knew whom he was talking to. They were Jews—the very descendants of Abraham! Surely that qualified them to be included in heaven!

Others, though, listened to John's words, repented, and were baptized in the river as a symbol that their hearts had been made right with God.

More and more people came to hear what John had to say. Many recognized him as a prophet and were baptized. But others scoffed. Among the scoffers were some of the religious leaders.

"Why do we need to be baptized? We are already in good standing with God," they arrogantly argued.

From out of nowhere a man approached John as he was busy baptizing people in the river. Looking up, John recognized Jesus—the very One he had been proclaiming! John couldn't believe it when Jesus stepped into the water.

Locusts were insects eaten by poor people. They provided a nutritious source of protein.

In the Old Testament, God challenged the Israelites to love and trust Him wholeheartedly as they stood before the Jordan River. (See Joshua 1—2.) Many generations later and on the banks of this very same river, John the Baptist challenged people with that message once again.

“Lord,” John said, “I need to be baptized by You, yet You come to me?”

Jesus looked into John’s eyes and spoke reassuringly. “It must be this way for now to fulfill God’s righteous requirements.”

By allowing Himself to be baptized, Jesus identified with all sinners and gave His approval to John’s message: “The kingdom of God is at hand ... and He is now standing in your midst!”

As Jesus came up out of the water, the heavens split open and the Spirit of God came down in the form of a dove and landed on Him. In that instant, God’s voice spoke from heaven: “This is My beloved Son, who pleases Me.” God Himself spoke for the entire world to hear, and when He did, He set His seal of approval on His Son, Jesus.

Footwork

Read Matthew 3:1–17. (Go on, look it up!) Notice what verse 17 says. How did God feel about Jesus?



People have many different opinions about Jesus. Some will scoff like the religious leaders; others will understand and believe in Him. Don’t be thrown off track by scoffers. God gave His divine approval to Jesus as His Son and to no one else. No opinion could be greater or matter more than God’s.