

REVELATION

COMING SOON

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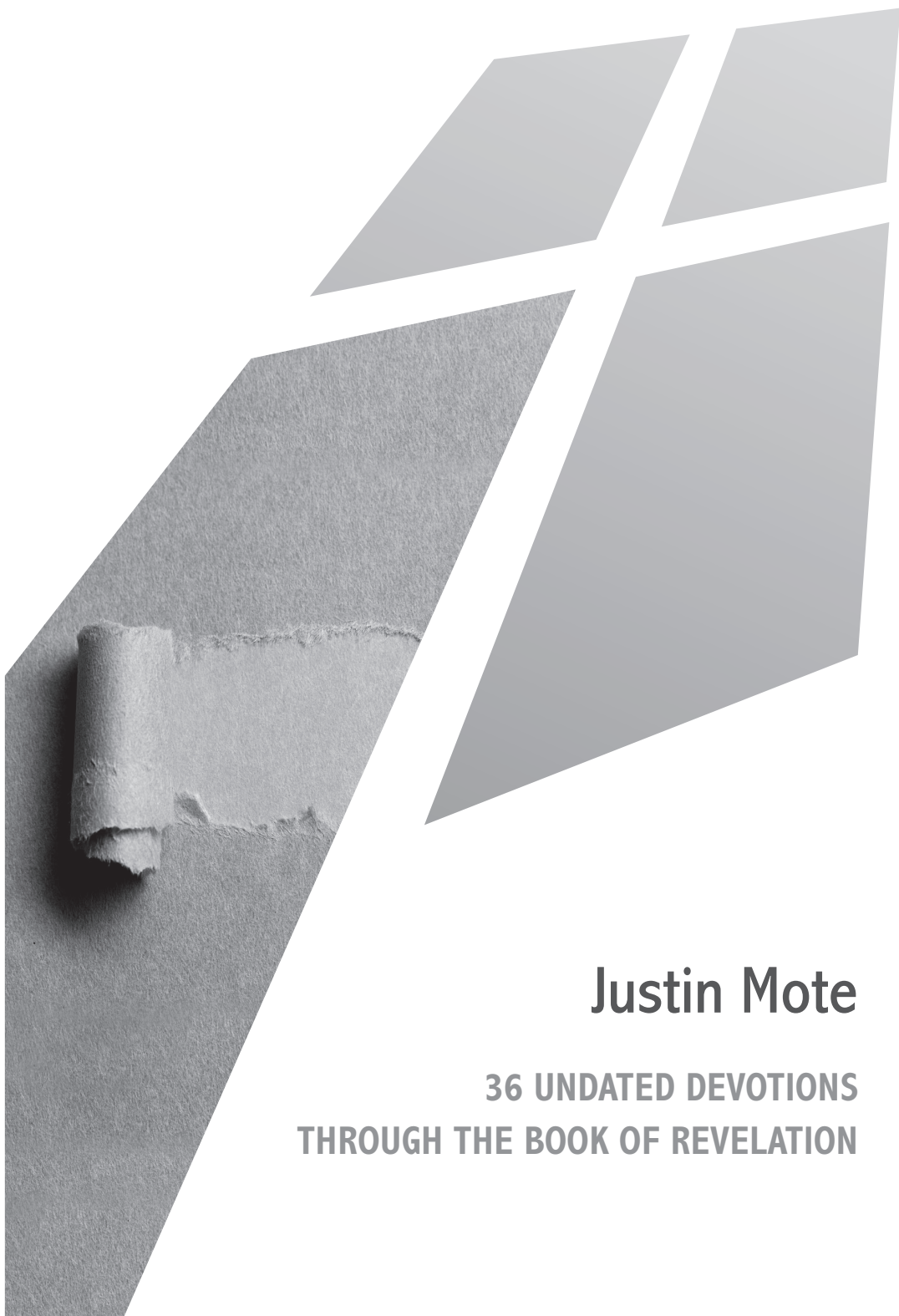
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**36 UNDATED DEVOTIONS
THROUGH THE BOOK OF REVELATION**

Many people are scared to read Revelation, the last book of the Bible and probably the last to be written. It contains weird-looking creatures and is full of strange, cryptic numbers, and so has been unread by many Christians.

As we journey through the pages of Revelation, we will see that most of what seems odd to us is not as daunting as we might think. What is unfamiliar finds its roots in the Old Testament. So be prepared to look up some Old Testament references!

Chapter 1 is the introduction to the whole book. It provides the context and outlines some of Revelation's major themes. Verses 1–3 tell us what the book is, what it is about and what benefits it will bring us.

First, we see that this is a 'revelation' (v. 1). That word, sometimes translated 'apocalypse', literally means 'unveiling'. It is like the drawing back of the curtains so that we are able to see what is really happening beyond the immediate. When the curtain draws back at the theatre, we see what is on stage. In this book we will be allowed to see what is happening and will happen from every angle and perspective.

Verse 1 also tells us that this revelation has come from Jesus Christ and is made known to John (of whom we will learn more in later verses) through angels. It concerns 'what must soon take place'. Most people have a fascination with the future, often trying to find it out by means of which God disapproves. Tarot cards, horoscopes, mediums and Ouija boards are all wrong ways of trying to discover the future. But everything we do need to know about the future, God has made known.

Secondly, this book is a testimony because John 'testifies' (v. 2). Just as a witness in court gives testimony to what they saw at a crime scene, so John will tell us all that Jesus has shown him. Further, this testimony is 'the word of God' (v. 2). That phrase is used by Jesus (see Mark 7:9–13) to refer to the Old Testament Scriptures. In other words, this book is to be treated as having the same authority as any other part of Scripture.

Thirdly, this book is a 'prophecy' (v. 3). This combines the previous two ideas: it is about the future and it is from God. In verse 3 John tells us what this prophecy will do for us, twice using the word 'blessed'. To be blessed means to be truly happy, but it has a bigger Bible meaning than that! It means to be declared in the right with God, never to have to face His judgement and so be able to live with Him for ever.

The response that brings this blessing is also spelled out in verse 3. Blessing comes to 'those who hear it and take it to heart'. We will learn what that means as we read on, but verse 3 concludes by telling us why we should respond to what John writes: 'because the time is near'.

REFLECTION

Are you excited about reading this book? Are you ready to find out about the future? Will you read on? Pray that the Lord would give you an appetite for hearing His word and taking it to heart.

In verses 1–3 we see that this book is a revelation, a testimony and also a prophecy. In verses 4–8 we see that Revelation is also a letter.

Verse 4 reflects the opening of other New Testament letters as we learn who the letter is from and who it is written for, followed by a greeting. The letter is from John (again we wait to find out more about him!) and is written to the seven churches of Asia. Indeed, if we didn't have the preface of verses 1–3, the book might be called Asians!

When John writes that Revelation is written to 'seven churches' (v. 4), we get the first of many numbers in the book. The number seven is the biblical number of fulfilment, perfection or completeness (echoing the seven days of Genesis 1–2). We get a list of the seven churches in verse 11. Not every city in Asia is included (for example, there is no mention of Colossae). Rather, these seven represent the whole church.

John then begins his greeting: 'Grace and peace'. These are the essential needs of all people. We need the grace of God that flows out into peace with God. Next John tells us about this God. He is eternal and a Trinity. John writes of 'the seven spirits', which is probably a reference to the 'complete or perfect' Spirit, and then of Jesus Christ. The grace and peace we need come from the uniquely everlasting and triune God.

As John continues, his focus is on Jesus. He tells us three things about Him in verse 5. First, He is the 'faithful witness'. That

means He can be relied on to be telling us the truth. Secondly, He is 'firstborn from the dead'. He shows us that it is possible to have life after death. Thirdly, He is 'ruler of the kings of the earth'. He is in control of our world and its leaders.

To this Jesus 'be glory and power for ever and ever!' (v. 6). Notice that this is not just because of who He is but, as verses 5–6 make clear, because of what He does and has done. Again, there are three things. First, Jesus 'loves us'! Secondly, He has 'freed us from our sins'! Thirdly, He has 'made us to be a kingdom and priests'. It means we are His special people. (You can follow that idea in Exodus 19:5–6.) No wonder John see Jesus as worthy of eternal glory.

Having looked to what Jesus has done and what He does now, the short poem in verse 7 looks forward. With echoes of Daniel 7:13, we see that Jesus is coming and that He will be seen by all people. Even those who thought that they could get rid of Jesus will see Him. It will be just as Jesus said to His accusers before the cross (see Mark 14:62). Further, for the nations this coming will be in judgement.

REFLECTION

How do you think about Jesus? Are you full of awe at who He is, what He has done for us and so want to worship Him?