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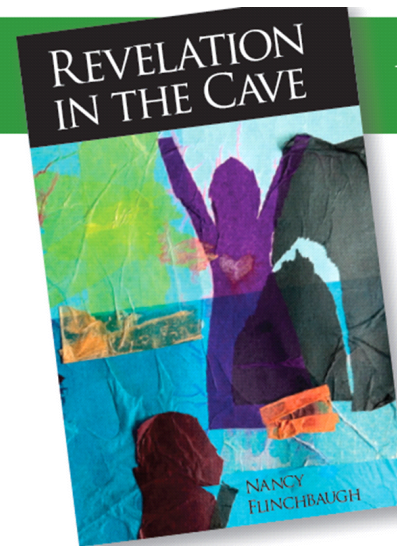
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## About Spiritual Seedlings

The mission of Spiritual Seedlings is to encourage a deep contemplative spirituality among its customers that helps them both create a fulfilling life of love in their own circles, as well as to equip them with tools to move toward future holistic solutions for their own lives and for corporate planetary life. The works come from a Christian viewpoint, but also look toward the love, truth and Spirit in all religions.

The first venture of the organization is publishing and marketing the book, *Revelation in the Cave*, a spiritual adventure written by Nancy Flinchbaugh which introduces the MAMs, the members of the Magnificent and Marvelous Book Club.

Spiritual Seedlings also offers sessions and retreats on themes in the book including Christian Contemplation and Discovering Your Passion. The sessions are offered in a variety of time frames from a one hour introductory retreat to a full weekend.



*A Novel by  
Nancy Flinchbaugh*

*Revelation in the Cave  
(A spiritual adventure)*

*Discussion and  
Study Guide*

# Revelation in the Cave

## Discussion and Study Guide

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Also available on line at [www.spiritualseedlings.com](http://www.spiritualseedlings.com)

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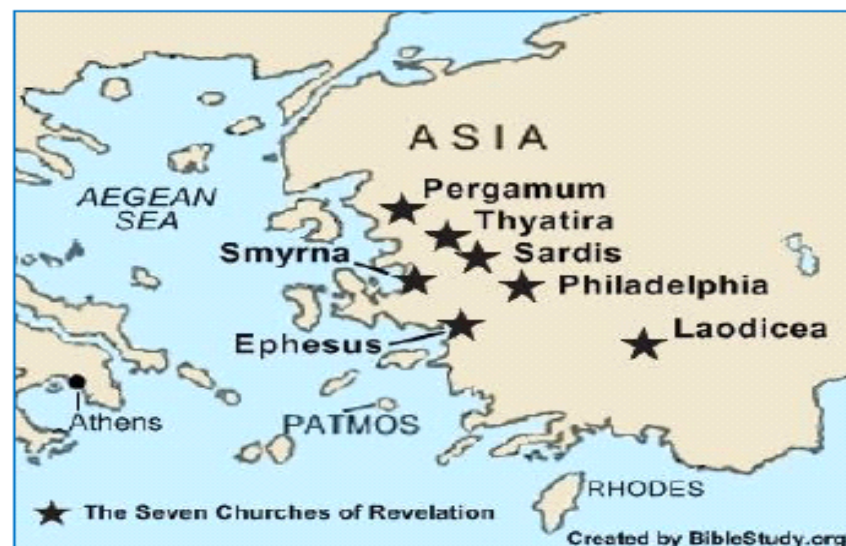
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### The Places of Revelation in the Cave



Above: On their cruise, the MAMs journeyed from Venice, Italy, down the coast between Italy and Albania to Greece, where they visited Corinth, Thessaloniki and Athens. Then they traveled further east to Kusadasi, Turkey, and then to Patmos, off the coast of Turkey. Below: Thecilla traveled to the seven cities of Revelation, which are labeled on this map of Asia.



When Brother Gabriel took Emily to the session on Buddhist meditation, her first response was to ask if that was Christian. He said: "Ah, little one, "Listen to the words, consider your God and tell me. Reserve judgment. Let the mind of Christ be yours... Consider the lilies, Jesus understood." What do you think Brother Gabriel meant by this? Do you believe meditation can be a part of Christian practice?"

Also at the conference were Whirling Dervishes. These contemplative Muslims dance as a form of prayer, something early Christians did also.

6. Have you ever danced as a form of prayer? Explain.

### **The Labyrinth**

At the end of the book, the MAMs have a session at the labyrinth, a place of walking prayer.

7. Have you ever walked a labyrinth? Discuss your experience.

Look for the next adventure of the MAMs coming soon: *Revelation at the Labyrinth*.

### **For further exploration:**

*The Mystic Heart* by Wayne Teasdale. (Brother Merkt played Wayne's role in the Conference of Mystics.) This book discusses the contemplative thread in the major religions of the world.

*Acts of Faith* by Eboo Patel. An associate of Wayne Teasdale, Eboo started the Interfaith Youth Service Corps, encouraging young people to serve together across interfaith lines to build intercultural understanding. This book discusses the transformative process of volunteering in his life and the life of others.

*Walking a Sacred Path: Rediscovering the Labyrinth as a Spiritual Practice* by Lauren Artress. Artress, an Episcopal priest, is often considered the founder of the modern day labyrinth movement. You can also find a labyrinth close to you to walk at: <http://labyrinthlocator.com/>. The author is also available to lead a session on the labyrinth. Visit [www.spiritualseedlings.com](http://www.spiritualseedlings.com) for more information.

## **About this Study Guide... a few words from the author**



When I embarked on the journey of writing this book, I had a specific goal in mind. I wanted to work with God to create a popular novel that would be a voice for nonviolence. Over time, my goal became to create a cross between the Ya Ya Sisterhood and the Da Vinci Code; an alternative to the Left Behind view of the Bible. As in most creative endeavors, the work developed a life of its own, becoming more than I originally imagined. My readers have been telling me that they enjoy it, and

perhaps the storyline eclipses some of the original purposes of the book. Therefore, I am creating this Study Guide to encourage readers to explore the meanings beneath the surface of the story line; those originally planned and those emerging in the creative process.

In my life, I take that quote by Socrates rather seriously, "The unexamined life is not worth living for a human being." And I would also suggest a corollary to his assertion, "The unexamined book is not worth reading." Although I have to admit I have spent many hours reading somewhat meaningless fiction as a diversion from the stresses of everyday life. But when it comes to writing a book of my own; I would only spend my time writing something that speaks to my hope and faith and the possibilities of love to which we are all called. So I offer this Study Guide to you as a way to help you explore more fully my original and evolving intentions. It is intended for group discussion in book clubs, churches or other groups. If you do nothing else, I hope you will consider studying "The Rapture Theory." This theory has made its way into modern American culture and taken root in much of the ideology of many evangelical churches. Yet, I do not believe the Rapture Theory to be a truth outlined in scripture, but rather an idea devised by an Irish cleric in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. So please, consider studying this theory. The Study Guide gives you a starting point, but you may want to go further on your own.

The other themes I have chosen to offer for further study are Transformation and Change, Mediation and Reconciliation, Non-violence, Thecla, Priscilla and Women in the Early Church, and Contemplative Spirituality. These are important aspects of the book which you might consider exploring further.

In addition to providing some discussion starters and guidance for exploration of these topics, I am also providing you background information from my writing journey. The book introduces the MAMs, the Magnificent and Marvelous Book Club, and so here you will find some background information on each of these women. They will be back in future adventures, and they will also hope to launch a virtual book club on the web in 2013.

I offer this at no cost to you, my readers, hoping that it will help the seeds of faith, hope and love deep in the pages to take root in some way in your life!

The following items are posted on the web:

- A matrix of the seven cities of the book of Revelation, as they relate to each of the MAMs, the scrolls and the teachings and journey of Thecilla to the seven churches. This guided my writing.
- Two short stories, “back story” about the MAMs. Their initial book club session and the book club session that started their archaeological interest.
- Photos from our journeys to Greece and Turkey while I researched and wrote this book. You might enjoy viewing these photos to help some of the scenes come alive in your imagination.
- A bibliography of some of the books that I read while working on this novel. I did a fair amount of research over the seven years that I was writing this book.

I welcome your comments and suggestions, both on our virtual book club website, as well as to me personally. You may email me at: [spiritualseedlings@gmail.com](mailto:spiritualseedlings@gmail.com) and visit me online at [www.spiritualseedlings.com](http://www.spiritualseedlings.com). If you “like” my Facebook page of *Revelation in the Cave* you will learn firsthand about events and future offerings. Please provide your email address if you want to be included in future emails about my books, speaking engagements and spiritual retreat offerings.

In process, as mentioned at end of the book, is *Revelation at the Labyrinth*, a sequel. I am also working on a contemplative primer, *Learning to Sit*.

Nancy Flinchbaugh  
Springfield, Ohio  
December, 2012

## **Spirituality, Mysticism and Contemplation in *Revelation in the Cave***

### **Spirituality in the book**

1. What role did spirituality play in the adventure of the MAMs in *Revelation in the Cave*?
2. The book describes several life changing spiritual encounters below. Discuss what happened in each of the instances and how it changed the person.

Katharine’s surgery

Moses Sun’s encounter with the speed boat

Thecla’s encounter with Paul

Thecilla’s encounter with John and his revelation

3. What life-changing spiritual encounters have you had and have they changed you?

### **The Conference of Mystics**

At the International Conference of Mystics, people from many countries gathered to share their spiritual practice and pray together. Most major world religions include some form of contemplative practice which involves silent meditation.

4. What role does contemplative practice play in your own life and/or in your spiritual tradition?
5. Have you ever attended a Taize worship or sung chanting prayer songs? If so, discuss your experience. Do chanting prayers help lead you into worship and God’s presence? Why or why not?

## Thecla, Priscilla and Early Christian Women

Thecla was quite a woman. Both the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches canonized her as a saint. Her story is told in an apocryphal book, in the public domain work online, as referenced in the preface of Flinchbaugh's book. Scholars differ on whether or not she was a historical character. One man confessed to fabricating the story, but other historians believe it to be true.

**1. Do you believe Thecla was a real person? Why or why not?**

**2. Read the original account online. What changes did Flinchbaugh make in this story?**

The story of Thecla glorifies virginity. Beginning with the Virgin Mary, the Christian Church has often glorified virginity. Within the Roman Catholic tradition, nuns, priests and others taking religious vows are expected to maintain virginity. What place does this belief have in your own spiritual belief? Do you see a value in virginity in spiritual terms? Why or why not?

**3. The story also suggests that Paul had a relationship with Thecla. Do you think such a relationship is plausible? Why or why not?**

According to the New Testament, Priscilla, the wife of Aquilla, was a friend of Paul and active in the early church. Some people hypothesize that she wrote the book of Hebrews. Scholars believe that she may have been raised as a Jewish boy, that she was well schooled in the Jewish scriptures. In *Revelation in the Cave*, Priscilla is the grandmother of Thecla, and would have been a friend of Thecla, because she also knew Paul. Lydia was a Greek business woman who was baptized by Paul.

**4. What role do you think women played in the early Christian church?**

**5. What do you believe Jesus thought about women?**

**6. Although the Jewish culture was patriarchal, do you believe the early Christian Church was the same?**

## Introducing the MAMs: The Magnificent and Marvelous Book Club

The Magnificent and Marvelous Book Club began their life together as "Romance Readers Anonymous." Over time, they branched out to other genres which led to their adventure in *Revelation in the Cave*. Look for their future journey in *Revelation at the Labyrinth*, and their virtual book club on the web coming soon. You will be able to join them to comment on some of the books they've read related to their adventures in *Revelation in the Cave*, the books inspiring *Revelation at the Labyrinth*, and other books they read together.

**Abigail Wesley** is a retired widow, a Quaker, and a Democrat. She recently had a hip replacement, unable to go on the MAMs archaeological expedition in search of Thecla, she sent her granddaughter, Emily Turner, a recent college graduate. Abigail is currently a student at Shalem Institute for Spiritual Formation and you'll be hearing more from her in the next book: *Revelation at the Labyrinth*.

**Katharine Long** is a married religion professor at Mainline College, a liberal arts college in Ohio. She has a fairly conservative personality and is moderate politically. She chose the book, *In Search of Paul*, that led to the MAMs adventure in Turkey.

**Jane Masters** is a single retired businesswoman with a hobby of spelunking. She's a Republican millionaire, often treating the MAMs to retreats. Her upbringing is Catholic and she is down-to-earth, a straight shooter who makes friends easily and gets along with most people.

**Molly Mabra** is the only African-American in the group, a Democrat who works in city government. She likes to write in her spare time. Married with two sons, one of whom is serving in the military in Iraq, she worries about him and his choice bothers her because she believes in nonviolence as a Christian and fan of Martin Luther King, Jr.

**Priscilla Johnson** is a single, prim administrative assistant, a Republican, Christian evangelical. She lives a conservative lifestyle, with no drinking and likes to wear high heels.

**Sallie Quisenberry** is a single, retired kindergarten teacher. She is quite chubby and loves to laugh from her belly. She spars with Jane a lot, and like Jane she rarely meets a stranger. A beloved icon in her home town, Sallie belongs to the Church of the Brethren and is a college friend of Abigail. She's been somewhat unconcerned about politics, but calls herself a Democrat if asked.

Also available online: "The Origin of the MAMs" and the infamous meeting that led to *Revelation in the Cave* – "The MAMs Book Club Meeting That Started It all".



## General Discussion on *Revelation in the Cave*

1. What did you enjoy about this book?
2. Which of the characters in *Revelation in the Cave* do you most identify with and why? Which of the characters did you like or not like and why:

Thecla	Thecilla
The MAMs: Abigail, Jane, Katharine, Molly, Priscilla and/or Sallie	
Emily	Ursula
Moses Sun	Dan Parks
Balaban	Others

2. What was the message of this book for you?
3. Following are some themes of the book. Which one was most important to you and what did you draw from this aspect of the book?

*The book of Revelation as a challenge to the Rapture Theory*  
*Nonviolence and Reconciliation.*

*Contemplative Spirituality in Christianity and other religions*

*Thecla, Priscilla and Women in the Early Church*

*Transformations and Change*

4. Did the book raise any issues that you'd like to explore more?
5. Flinchbaugh plans to write additional books of adventures of the MAMs. Where would you like them to go and what would you like them to explore in future books?

## Nonviolence

*Revelation in the Cave* interprets the book of Revelation as a message to the early Christians to keep faith, to worship and to follow the Lamb, not to become like their oppressors, the Romans. *Revelation in the Cave* suggests that the early Christians were following the path of the Lamb, who was slaughtered, a savior who came to serve and taught love of enemies; that the Christians were not to take up arms against the Romans.

Religious people have long debated the place of nonviolence and war in the world. Some spiritual traditions assert that violence has no place in right actions. Christians such as the Mennonites, Brethren and Quakers hold this teaching; taking literally Jesus' teaching on peace and loving your enemies. Buddhists don't believe a person should ever become violent. History tells us more wars have been fought over religious differences than any other reason.

Below are three different views on the place of war and violence within an ethical system.

**Nonviolence/Pacifism.** This approach believes that violence is never an option to overcome oppression or respond to violence. Active nonresistance and political activity may effectively address injustice and oppression without using violence, such as Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Civil Rights movement and Gandhi's leadership overcoming colonialism in India.

**Just War Theory.** Some religious and ethical theorists believe that war is justified at times, if certain conditions are met. An example of the conditions often required are: 1) The war must be for a just cause. 2) The war must be lawfully declared by a lawful authority. 3) The intention behind the war must be good. 4) All other ways of resolving the problem should have been tried first. 5) There must be a reasonable chance of success. 6) The means used must be in proportion to the end that the war seeks to achieve.

**Holy Wars.** Holy wars usually have three elements: 1) The achievement of a religious goal, 2) authorized by a religious leader and 3) a spiritual reward for those who take part.

### Questions for Discussion

1. Which of these three theories is closest to your current beliefs?
2. On what basis do you reach your beliefs related to nonviolence/violence?
3. Did *Revelation in the Cave* cause you to rethink your position on nonviolence? Why or why not?

## Mediation and Reconciliation in *Revelation in the Cave*

Perhaps one of the most controversial aspects of *Revelation in the Cave* is the relationship between Katharine and Moses Sun. After Sun shoots Katharine, she requests mediation with him.

1. What were your thoughts on Katharine's request for mediation with a man who shot her?
2. Which of the characters did you most identify with related to their feelings about Sun after the shooting?

Katharine – who wanted to forgive him

Katharine's husband who wanted him to be locked up

The MAMs who listened to God, hearing they should forgive

Sun himself who believed he should be punished for his action

*Mediation is a process between two people with a conflict, where a neutral, third party guides the disputants to find a win-win solution to their situation. Victim-Offender mediation is used to give a victim of a crime a chance to dialogue about the event with the perpetrator. The perpetrator often is able to apologize and make amends. It can also help provide healing and closure for the victim, when they are able to forgive the perpetrator.*

3. What role, if any, do you see for Victim-Offender mediation in our society?

*Over 1.8 million people are incarcerated in State and Federal prisons (US Statistical Abstract 2012) ( When they come back into our communities, it is very difficult for them to find a job or even a place to live, because of their criminal background.*

4. What strategies would you recommend that we undertake to deal with this problem?

### Healing the Political Divide

*Another interesting aspect of Revelation in the Cave is the relationship between Emily (Democrat) and Josh (Republican). They were able to mend their differences and before their wedding had a chance for people to dialogue about how to bring the Democrats and Republicans back together in the USA.*

6. What do you think would be some ways to heal our divided political communities?
7. Are there any actions you personally can take to help this process?

## Change and Transformation in *Revelation in the Cave*

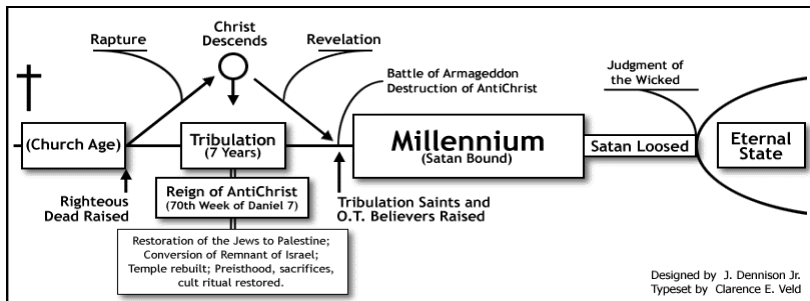
The themes of change and transformation are an important part of the story of *Revelation in the Cave*. As the MAMs tell their story, a defining moment for them was their visit to the Butterfly House near the Canadian side of Niagara Falls. At that point in their group life, they switched from reading only romance novels to exploring different genres. This eventually led them into the adventure of a lifetime; an archaeological dig in Turkey.

1. **Reread the MAMs discussion on pages 99-102 when they consider the possibility of change within individual lives. With whom do you most agree with in this discussion? Do you believe personal change possible? Why or why not?**
2. **Think about a significant turning point in your own life? What triggered the change and how dramatic was it for you? Did you engineer the change? Did God engineer the change, or is there another explanation?**
3. **Many of the characters experienced a personal transformation in *Revelation in the Cave*. Talk about the transformation for each of the following characters. How would you explain this change? Was it something each of them personally engineered, a spiritual awakening or something else?**  
  
Mose Sun   Ursula   Katharine   Emily   Jane   Priscilla  
Molly   Sallie   Thecilla   Thecla
4. **Are you longing for change in your life? If so, what are some steps you could take to move toward this change?**

## Revelation in the Cave and the Rapture Theory

The Bible certainly makes reference to the end times, and these passages have been interpreted in many ways over time. One such interpretation, the Rapture Theory, holds that Jesus will physically lift all believers, living and dead, to heaven just before the great tribulation described in the book of Revelation. The Rapture Theory actually stemmed from a Scottish girl's vision, which was then elaborated by a British cleric, John Nelson Darby, in 1830. He brought his theory to the United States and it was explained in the Schofield Chain Reference Bible, a bestseller in the early 1900s. Many Christians today believe this theory, but probably are not aware that it is a relatively new invention. The theory pieces together passages from very different parts of the Bible (Daniel 9:25-27, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, Matthew 24:39-42, Matthew 24-25, John 14:1-2 and the Book of Revelation's apocalyptic passages).

This theory is considered "premillennialist" of which there are several versions, with the Rapture Theory also referred to as "Dispensationalist Premillennialism." Millennialism refers to end-time beliefs about a 1,000-year golden age on Earth. "Premillennialists" believe Jesus will return to Earth before the millennium; 'Post-millennialists' believe he will return after it. "Amillennialists" believe the golden age is largely symbolic. Each of these theories has several variations. A graphic depiction of this theory is offered here:



Another viewpoint would hold that such an interpretation reads too much into the scripture. They prefer a more general interpretation of the end times, such as this view, called amillennialism.



The idea of "The Rapture" --- the return of Christ to rescue and deliver Christians off the earth --- is an extremely popular interpretation of the Bible's book of Revelation and a jumping-off point for the best-selling "Left Behind" series of books. This interpretation, based on a psychology of fear and destruction, guides the daily acts of thousands if not millions of people worldwide. In *The Rapture Exposed*, Barbara Rossing argues that this script for the world's future is nothing more than a disingenuous distortion of the Bible. The truth, Rossing argues, is that Revelation offers a vision of God's healing love for the world. Her concern is that this leads some Christians to applaud ecological disasters and escalation of tension in the Middle East as signs that Armageddon will soon arrive. Rossing asserts that: "The Bible does not provide a predictive screenplay for worldwide violence and disaster in the Middle East. Revelation's gift to us is a story of a God who loves us and comes to live with us. Biblical prophets are not predictors of end-times events, they are inspired voices, calling people to repentance and justice. They tell the wonderful and crucial story of God's faithfulness. They give us hope."

In *Revelation in the Cave*, each scroll adds some interpretation to the book of Revelation, similar to Rossing's theory.

1. Re-read Thecilla's visits to the seven churches and related scrolls. What themes are called out in each of these visits? What is the interpretation of Revelation according to these scriptures?
2. Why do you think that Katharine and Emily were so convinced that the Rapture Theory was not a true interpretation of scripture?
3. What interpretation did Moses Sun, Priscilla and Emily's boyfriend, Josh, have at the beginning of the book? Do you think their viewpoints changed? Why or why not?
4. What is your personal belief about the Rapture Theory?
5. Do you think that this theory causes Christians to promote violence? Why or why not?

For further exploration, Barbara Rossing's: *The Rapture Exposed*. David May's: *Revelation: Weaving a Tapestry of Hope*.