

Reading Group Guide for  
*The Prophetess*  
by Jill Eileen Smith

1. Deborah's story comes from Judges 4–5, in which we are told that Deborah was the wife of Lappidoth. What character qualities do you see in Lappidoth at the beginning of the book? What do you like about him? Dislike?
2. Deborah is not pleased with her father's choice of husband. Have you ever been in a situation where you were given something you did not desire? Or been in a situation you wish you could change? How did you handle it?
3. In chapter 1, the land has been under oppression from Canaan, and Deborah is caught up in a vision of what is to come. How does she react to the knowledge that God is calling her to lead Israel? Why might this knowledge have been hard to accept in her day? Do you think women today still struggle with roles of leadership, especially in spiritual matters? Why?
4. In chapter 2, Deborah's children are grown and her daughter has become a thorn in her side, always challenging her authority. How does Talya's introduction as Deborah's beloved nemesis set the tone for the rest of the story? Have you ever dealt with a difficult person?
5. In what ways does Talya make Deborah's life better? In what ways does she make her life more difficult? Have you ever had to deal with a difficult child? Or have you ever felt smothered by a parent or wanted to escape from under their control? How did you handle these situations?
6. In chapter 3, we are introduced to Barak (pronounced Bare-eck) and discover that he has lost his wife to the forces of Canaan's commander, Sisera. How might her loss have fueled Barak's anger and desire to rid Israel of this evil foe? Can you put yourself in his shoes and imagine what living with terrorism in that day might have felt like? How does this make you more empathetic to people of our day who face similar terrorism?
7. In chapter 4, we are introduced to Jael and her family. Though the argument with Heber's brother is an imagined reason for their move away from their tribe, could it be a plausible one? Have you ever had an argument come between you and someone you were once close to? Was it ever healed? If so, do you care to share it with the group? If not, what can yet be done about it?
8. At one point Talya discovers her cousin Yiskah worshiping Asherah. How does Talya react? What does this tell us about her true heart? How does that play out later in the story?
9. Talya gets lost in the woods in her attempt to find her cousin. How does this circumstance change her? How does it affect Deborah? Have you ever experienced some significant life scare? How has it changed the way you see life?
10. In the story, Heber "befriends" both Canaan and Israel. Have you ever had to befriend an enemy in order to protect yourself or your family? What happened?

11. Talya eventually finds rescue from Barak and returns home, but then she makes a foolish decision to try to force Barak to wed her. What character qualities in Talya might have caused her to do this? What do you think contributed to her thinking she could get her way?
12. Idolatry was something Israel struggled with throughout the period of the judges. What kinds of idols do we face today in our country, in our lives? Do you ever feel like you are being tested for a greater purpose? If so, for what?
13. Jael meets Sisera long before she has that one defining moment with him. What strikes the most fear in her heart where Sisera is concerned? Has anyone ever made you afraid? How did you handle it?
14. In chapter 13, Deborah hears of more of Sisera's destruction and says, "Oh Adonai, Adonai, how long? Will You forget us forever?" Have you ever felt like God has forgotten you? When have you prayed for something only to still wait for an answer?
15. Deborah realizes that Sisera is trying to destroy the Israelites' morale, to make them weak. Have you ever faced a difficult situation or person who tried to destroy your morale? How did you handle it? How did God grow you in those moments?
16. How does the rescue of Yiskah later play into the story? Can a person like Yiskah be forgiven and allowed a second chance? Why do you think her husband struggled so much to give that to her?
17. Barak grieves the loss of his wife Nessa for over three years. Why do you think it was so hard for him to move on with his life? How would you comfort someone going through grief or difficult trials?
18. Barak is commanded to lead his men to fight Canaan. Why do you think he refuses to go unless Deborah goes with him? Have you ever lost out on an opportunity to do something because of fear or hesitancy? What happened?
19. When the final victory is over and Israel is free once again, how do they celebrate? How does the war affect Deborah's feelings for her husband, and what does she do about them? What causes Talya to change from rebellious to obedient, and how does that affect the way Barak sees her? Can you relate to any of these situations? How have life's circumstances changed you?
20. Deborah says in her victory song that "when new gods were chosen, then war was in the gates." In the Ten Commandments, God makes it clear that He wants no other gods before Him. What can we learn about God from this, and why do you think He wants singular worship? How has worship of Him alone helped or blessed you?