

Discussion Questions for *The Living Wood*

1. Discuss the characters of Helena and Constantius. Do they seem well suited for each other?
2. Discuss the character of King Coel. Does he seem to have a prophetic gift?
3. What was Roman culture like? What was their view on religion and morality?
4. Why did Constantius leave Helena? What was her reaction?
5. Discuss King Coel's love of legends and his favorite legend, the story about the living wood/tree of life. Why do you think this was his favorite legend?
6. What was your reaction to Helena and Albanus' conversation the first time she met him? Do you think his arguments for Christianity were convincing?
7. Why did Albanus tell Helena that now that she has lost everything, she could now gain true love and would have power?
8. How and why were the Christians persecuted under the Emperor Diocletian?
9. Why did Helena think that Christianity was a religion for the weak?
10. How did the example of the Christians around Helena, such as her servant Hilary, impact and change her?
11. How does Helena's life change with the death of her husband, Constantius?
12. What is the relationship like between Helena and her son, Constantine? How does the relationship grow and change throughout the novel?
13. What does it mean that the "true poet is also a true prophet"? How does Virgilius' poem affect Constantine's opinion about Christianity?
14. What was at stake with the battle with Maxentius at the Milvian Bridge? What happened when Constantine saw the cross in the sky? Did he really believe in Christianity or was it superstition?
15. How did Crispus' death affect Helena? Discuss her talk with Bishop Osius. Why did she feel like she failed because of the sins of her son? Are her feelings understandable?
16. How did Helena find the True Cross? Did King Coel's prophecies come true?
17. This is a historical novel—was it believable? Did you do any research to see how much of the story was factual versus how much was artistic license by the author?

