

Trinity Centre for Biblical Studies

Post-graduates in Focus Series

An interview with **Rachel Wilkowski** who began the Ph.D. programme in 2021.¹

Rachel, we really appreciate your participation in this series.

Would you mind telling us about your background and the path you took to a Ph.D. in Biblical Studies?

I have been fascinated by the Old Testament/Hebrew Bible since I was a child. I was especially captivated by the scope of the OT/HB accounts. I loved, for example, the story of Joseph, on his deathbed, asking his descendants to bring his bones back to the land of promise and, generations later, his descendants doing that very thing.

At times, though, I was at a loss to understand certain accounts because of their temporal and cultural distance from my day to day experience. At others times, I was at a loss to understand why certain stories, poems, proverbs, or prophecies were in the Bible. What was the theological point that God/the authors/compiler (depending on your point of view) were trying to communicate? Fundamentally, this is what motivated my studies and, in particular, my concern for children's experiences of the OT/HB.

Why did you choose to come to TCD for your Ph.D.?

My primary concern informing my school selection was who I would work with. I wanted to work with a supervisor whom I connected with, who would allow me to explore certain questions that I already had in mind, who would guide that exploration, and who would help shape my career path.

In an early exploratory meeting with David Shepherd, now my PhD supervisor, it was clear to me that he embodied all of these criteria. Even better, he had done some prior work with Bible reception in children's media, which is a rarity in the field. So, I came to TCD to work with David!

Would you mind sharing a little about the topic of your Ph.D. thesis?

My thesis analyses adaptations of Genesis 1–3 in select Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish children's Bibles published between 1980 and 2020, considers the extent to which the adaptive choices correspond to each tradition's history of interpretation, and explores possible reasons for similarities and differences within and across the traditions.

¹ This is the eleventh in a series of interviews with Ph.D. students, and recent graduates, who are members of the Trinity Centre for Biblical Studies.

What are some of the highlights of your time at TCD?

Without a doubt, the highlight of my time at TCD has been the opportunity to explore questions of interpretation in modern children's Bibles, both in my thesis and in discussions with David. I came to TCD with a fairly clear idea of the questions that I wanted to explore in my thesis. Having the time and space to dive deeply into these questions with guidance from David has been invaluable. These experiences have formed me not only as a scholar—refining my writing and critical thinking skills—but also as an individual—helping me to gain a clearer sense of self and my place in the world.

I have also loved the many experiences to share my research through conference presentations, competition submissions, and interactions with my fellow PhD students in the School of Religion.

Do you have any advice for prospective Ph.D. students?

I would say: Only do a PhD if you can't *not* do it; if you have a burning question that you are willing to dedicate the next handful of years of your life to considering. I love my PhD topic and, many days, I look forward to sitting down to write and read. That being said, it is hard work. Day by day, it can feel like I am accomplishing little, and it is easy to wonder whether my work is valuable and meaningful, whether it is worth the time and effort. When I am in these moments, it helps me to remember that I am doing this research because I *needed* to do it, because I felt that these questions were significant and worth exploring for years.

Thank you, Rachel, we really appreciate you taking the time to respond to our questions.