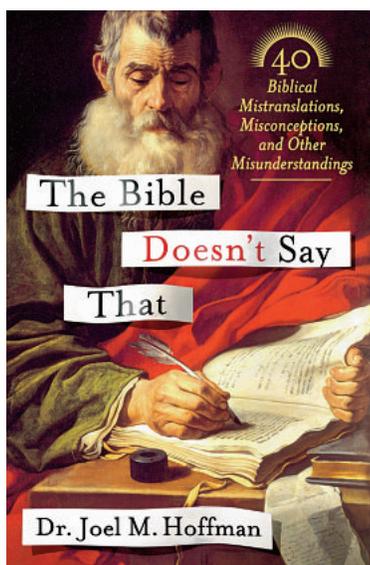


GOD'S COMPLEX



Joel Hoffman has a doctorate in theoretical linguistics and writes on the meaning of the Bible's words.



A surefire way to start a debate over the dinner table is to launch into a discussion about politics or religion. Joel Hoffman offers fodder for religious debaters in his book, "The Bible Doesn't Say That: 40 Biblical Mistranslations, Misconceptions, and Other Misunderstandings." Hoffman has a Ph.D. in linguistics and has studied the ancient languages and their meaning. In the course of his research, Hoffman says he found several Biblical mistranslations that he believes have led to major misconceptions.

LN: What are some of the more interesting misrepresentations you found in researching the book?

I would say the misrepresentations come in a variety of types. The texts in particular around homosexuality have been very widely distorted on both sides of the social debate. So essentially people who want homosexuality to be evil misrepresent the text to make it say that, and people who want the Bible to specifically allow for homosexuality also misrepresent the Bible to say that. And the truth is more interesting and more nuanced.

Some pastors today seem overly focused on the prosperity gospel. What does your research say about that?

The prosperity gospel is interesting in that its most vocal supporters have very little foundation in the actual text. That's a pretty major distortion.

What do you hope readers of the book will come away with?

Some of the most prominent interpreters of the Bible misrepresent it. The Bible is both more beautiful and much more relevant than most people think.

I'm not writing this book with any particular modern agenda, I'm not trying to convince people of anything. ... I'm asking as a researcher a neutral question: Stripped of its biases, what does the original text mean?

Anyone who cares about the human condition should care about the Bible because the people who really investigated the human condition over the course of 1,000 years were the denizens of Jerusalem.

Joel Hoffman discusses his book at the Book Festival of the Marcus Jewish Community Center of Atlanta. Nov. 8, 12:30 p.m. ■