

We sat down with one of our newest authors, Dr. Leonard Greenspoon.

Dr. Greenspoon has been studying classics and theology for practically his entire life, teaching theology at Creighton University for the last 20 years, and is the Chair of Creighton's Jewish Civilization program. Before Creighton, Dr. Greenspoon taught religious studies at Clemson University for 20 years, following a Ph.D in Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations at Harvard University.

This fall, Dr. Greenspoon published his landmark work on bible translations, "Jewish Bible Translations: Personalities, Passions, Politics, Progress." The book looks at bible translations across eleven different languages and 24 centuries. "Jewish Bible Translations" is the result of eight years of effort on the part of Dr. Greenspoon.

Greenspoon's key takeaway was a focus on background. Though Jewish translations of the bible each have "marked, distinctive, consistent features," Greenspoon said that, "...to fully understand each translation, you have to know the context in which the translator lived." Greenspoon said he wrote the book in part because the topic of translations (and their respective translators) has been understudied and underappreciated in the Jewish world.

Bible translations are not neutral, ambivalent bridges from one language to another, he said. Instead, each bible translator has a specific *goal* in mind, which influences the author puts pen to paper. The environment in which the author was writing heavily influenced how they translated the original hebrew text.

"Bible translations both reflect and are meant to influence their generation," he said.

Just one example Dr. Greenspoon gave: the Tafsir, the authoritative Arabic-Hebrew translation by Rav Saadia Gaon, was written about a thousand years ago. At that time, the Karaites -- Jews who relied on the literal text of the Torah only, and completely disregarded rabbinic teachings -- had become a force in Babylonia. In his direct translation, Saadia Gaon translates the commandment from literal Hebrew, "don't boil a kid in its mother's milk," as "Don't mix milk and meat," in Arabic. Why? Because the *rabbinic* interpretation of the commandment was to not mix milk and meat at all, an interpretation the Karaites rejected. Saadia Gaon portrayed the text in this way as a push-back against the Karaites. This is an example of a translator being influenced by, and attempting to influence the generation reading their translation.

Dr. Greenspoon's nearly decade-long effort came with certain obstacles he needed to scale. He said the number of translations he could cover was limited by the amount of languages he knew firsthand. He says he knows Greek, Latin, French, German, Italian, and Aramaic - all of which were not enough to completely ferry him through the work. Dr. Greenspoon needed to immerse himself in languages like Russian, Hungarian and Chinese -- along with Chinese, Hungarian and Russians culture -- to fully understand the translations he studied.

Another challenge was becoming fluent in the history of each translator and the *cultures* they lived in -- all of which inform the texts they produced.

Even though each translator has their own goal in relaying the text, Dr. Greenspoon finds that each translation adds to his knowledge of the text in a different way.

“On any number of occasions, the translations will open up some new vista for me...” he began. “...So in this case, I will counter one of the rabbinic concerns about translation, specifically the Septuagint. [They said] Translation is like caging a bird. The text is wide open, 70 or more interpretations: and the translation locks down one. I’ve also seen how the opposite can be true.”

Dr. Leonard Greenspoon’s book, “Jewish Bible Translations: Personalities, Passions, Politics, Progress,” hit the market in November and is currently available to purchase at our website, [here](#).