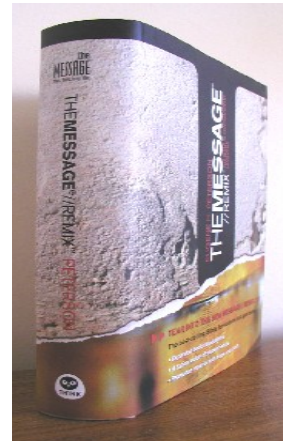


Review :

Eugene H Peterson's THE MESSAGE

Eugene H Peterson's The Message® is a paraphrase of the Bible from the original languages to “contemporary language”.



On the jacket it claims to be “for students”. This must mean children at school, as this reviewer found it to be supremely useless as a tool for quality Bible study. The dust jacket confirmed this, as the book was not endorsed by capable Bible scholars, but rather by two young recording artists.

Eugene H Peterson's The Message® (PTM) claims to be written in 'the language of the people'. The language of the people Peterson knows is full of cliché, such as “They have made their bed and now must lie on it”, “small potatoes”, “from bad to worse”, “knocked the wind out”, “play second fiddle” and “as it turns out”. Examples of cliché can be found on every page, from recent American to historical 18th Century English sayings.

The Hebrew language of the Bible is very simple with far fewer words than English, and though sometimes idiomatic, is without cliché. Cliché uses many words to express simple ideas and makes language more complex. In the Hebrew and Greek texts the idiom is the exception rather than the rule, with the meaning determined by the context. A rare example of idiom is Job's comment “escaped by skin (of) my teeth”.

PTM is not suitable for those with English as a second language as it is so full of obscure meaning hidden in the cliché. For example, “knocked the wind out” originated when Britain ruled the seas with warships with sails, where losing the wind from the sail meant loss of motion. For someone from a non-English background, or who is not well educated, this is incomprehensible. A simple translation of the scriptures, such as the New International Version (NIV) with a reading age of 8, may be comprehended by someone who has English as a second language. PTM is best appreciated by people with extensive knowledge of complex English expression, with some even beyond the extensive vocabulary of this reviewer.

PTM is best appreciated by people with extensive knowledge of complex English expressions

The use of complex English expressions leads to interesting vibrant text, however, these can be a distraction from the sense of the Hebrew or Greek narrative. For example Ezekiel 9 contains a vision which is serious but in PTM Ezekiel sees six men each carrying his “lethal weapon”. All weapons are lethal, it would not be a weapon if it couldn't kill. This is tautology. In the Hebrew it says they had “a tool/implement for a-smiting in hand”. In addition this tautology is a title to a popular movie. While reading this text the meaning of the Hebrew text is lost and images of a Hollywood movie are substituted.

The over-use of cliché causes distractions from the intent of the original communication.

Peterson's over-use of cliché causes distractions from the intent of the original communication, and therefore, PTM does not support directed study.

The PTM chapter and verse formatting makes navigation difficult and there are no cross references. Both of these defects will prevent it from becoming useful to Bible students. Of more serious concern to a Bible student is

Does The Message paraphrase translation pass the Bible's own test?

The reviewer, Janet Henriksen, has completed a Masters degree, where high standards for the precise use of clear English are required. She reads extensively all types of literature. She writes often on biblical subjects but also has created poetry and fiction. Her favourite bible is e-sword, as it is many versions in one and gives her access to the Hebrew and Greek text. This review is also on www.biblefocus.net

The Bible's test

You shall not add to the word which I command you, neither shall you remove from out of it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you. (Deuteronomy 4:2)

Every word of God is pure: he is a shield unto them that put their trust in him. Add you not unto his words, lest he reprove you, and you be found a liar. (Proverbs 30:5-6)

For I testify unto every person that hears the words of the prophecy of this book, If any person shall add unto these things, God shall add unto them the plagues that are written in this book: And if any person shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away their part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book. (Revelation 22:18-19).

The condemnation of those who add to the words of God is serious. Special care must be taken when translating that words (ideas) are not added or taken away. The Jews who copied the text ensured that not one letter or word was to be added or left out. In Hebrew such English joining words, or clarification of relationship, such as 'and', 'he' 'she' or 'it', 'beside' and 'of' are not words, but prefixes or suffixes. Hebrew words are concepts, or things, adjectives or nouns.

God is very severe regarding the fate of those adding and subtracting words from Revelation as it his message to his servants (Revelation 1:1) Adding or subtracting can change the sense of the message and inhibit communication and a lack of clear communication damages relationships.

Three passages from Peterson's 'The Message' (PTM) were randomly selected

PASSAGE 1

Exodus 20:1-3

GOD spoke all these words. I am GOD, your GOD who brought you out of the land of Egypt out of a life of slavery. No other gods, only me. *The Message*.

A word for word translation of the Hebrew text (Tanakh) (compare Strong's and JPS)

Exodus 20:1 : וידבר אלהים את כל-הדברים האלה לאמר: ◀start

> And said Elohim all the words← these saying

2 אנכי יהוה אלהיך אשר הוצאתיך מארץ מצרים מבית עבדים: ◀start

> I (am) Yahweh your-Elohim which bring-out-you of-land Egypt of-house bondage(plural)

3 לא יהיה-לך אלהים אחרים עלי-פני: ◀start

> Not to-exist to-you Elohim other unto/before your-face/presence

In verse one PTM leaves out the concept in the Hebrew text that Elohim say the words *actively* to the people, by deleting reference to the Hebrew “to say”. By writing “GOD spoke” PTM does not indicate when the speaking was done.

In verse two PTM substitutes 'God' for 'Yahweh' making 2 different words the same. He also substitutes 'life' for 'house'. This changes the concept, as Hebrew *bayith* is about place or dwelling, whereas life is about existence/breathing. Also PTM uses word 'slavery' is for Hebrew *ebed* which is about serving or providing service. 'Slavery' is a stronger kind of servitude, but not unreasonable.

In verse three PTM deletes the word 'to-exist' and the idea that we can bring before our face another god. He substitutes instead “only me” which repeats the idea behind “no other gods”.

In summary in Passage 1 PTM's translation does not add to our knowledge of the Hebrew text, instead two important concepts are subtracted. It fails the test as it removes words that materially effect how someone understands the passage.

...two important concepts are subtracted.

PASSAGE 2

Psalm 88v1-3

GOD, you're my last chance of the day, I spend the night on my knees before you. Put me on your salvation agenda, take notes on the trouble I'm in. I've had my fill of trouble, I'm camped on the edge of hell. *The Message*.

A word for word translation of the Hebrew text (Tanakh) (compare Strong's and JPS)

שִׁיר מְזִמּוֹר לְבִנֵי קֹרַח לְמִנְצַח עַל־מַחְלַת לַעֲנֹת מִשְׁכִּיל לְהִימָן הָאֲזָרְחִי: ◀start

> Singing Psalm to Son (of) Korah to chief-musician on sickness to (the) humble instruct (KJV retains Hebrew Mahalath Leannoth) to Heman the Ezrahite.

1 יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יִשׁוּעָתִי יוֹם־צַעֲקָתִי בַלַּיְלָה נִגְדָר: ◀start

>1 Yahweh Eloah of my salvation day **cried** I and in night before (Heb:front) you.

2 תָּבוֹא לְפָנַי תִּפְלְתִי הִטָּה־אָזְנוֹךָ לְרִנָּתִי: ◀start

> 2 Enter into your presence (Heb:face) my prayer. Turn (Heb:Stretch) ear unto my **cry**.

3 כִּי־שָׁבַעָה בְרַעוֹת נַפְשִׁי וְחַיִּי לְשֹׂאֵל הַגִּיעוּ: ◀start

>3 As full-of trouble (Heb:evil) my soul and my life to grave reaches.

Peterson's 'The Message'(PTM) removes all reference to the purpose of the psalm which in a Jewish version is verse one of this Psalm.

In verse one of PTM's version the words 'Yahweh Eloah' become 'GOD', losing every sense of the Hebrew distinction and deleting a Hebrew word. The word 'my salvation' becomes “last chance of the day” where the word “day” is annexed to “salvation” rather than being associated with “crying”. In PTM the concept of “crying” is deleted entirely. In Hebrew poetry the repetition of thought is the poetic device. Notice in the word for word translation of the Hebrew 'cry' appears again in verse two. PTM *removes* a word that makes the Hebrew poetry and connects the thoughts of the first two verses. Peterson's 'The Message' adds “on my knees”. The concept of “on my knees” is not anywhere implied in the Hebrew. How would they play a musical instrument on their knees?

Verse two of PTM equates salvation with a prayer coming to the face of Yahweh Eloah. In doing this PTM removes the Hebrew poetic device connecting to verse one. PTM has in this translation *both* added a concept not in the Hebrew words *and* deleted one concept. PTM uses the phrase “take notes”, whereas, the Hebrew words have no sense of the concept of writing. PTM consistently removes the concept of crying out. This is quite sad as the raw emotion of the Hebrew text is lost in PTM. Taking notes is not the same as listening intently. The sense of direct communication with the Power of the universe is lost in PTM.

Verse 3 PTM in translating 'As full of trouble my soul' as 'I've had my fill’ changes the sense of the Hebrew to past tense. The Hebrew is present tense. In translating the tense PTM loses the deep emotional content of a person in present trouble. PTM deletes reference to the soul. In Hebrew this is breathing. By removing this word PTM loses the deep resonances of the heavier breathing that comes from emotional confession of trouble and the experience of emotion. PTM translates Hebrew words that have the sense of motion towards a place (in Hebrew the prefix ל) to instead be a person “camped” on the edge of hell. Camping is a temporary abode, or sitting, which indicates a stopping, or pause in motion. The Hebrew “towards” implies a struggle, or being unwillingly dragged to a place. PTM has lost this concept.

In summary Passage 2 PTM has added two concepts and deleted the most important poetic concept and changed the tense twice.

PTM has added words and is in risk of the condemnation of Proverbs

By adding the concepts PTM has added words and is in risk of the condemnation of Proverbs. In deleting a powerful emotional concept, that of “crying” PTM may endanger the relationship between the faithful and Yahweh. This is the principle behind of the condemnation of adding words or subtracting words or concepts from a revelation of Yahweh Eloah.

PASSAGE 3

Revelation 13:8 Randomly selected from near the end of the Bible.

Everyone on earth whose name was not written from the world's foundation in the slaughtered Lamb's Book of Life will worship the Beast.

Are you listening to this? They've made their bed, now they must lie in it. Anyone marked for prison goes to straight to prison, anyone pulling a sword goes down by the sword. Meanwhile God's holy people passionately and faithfully hold their ground. *The Message*.

The Greek text and interlined is a word for word translation (Compare Nestle and Diaglot)

8 καὶ προσκυνήσουσιν αὐτὸν πάντες οἱ κατοικοῦντες ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, ὧν οὐ γέγραπται τὸ ὄνομα ἐν τῷ βιβλίῳ τῆς ζωῆς τοῦ ἀρνίου τοῦ ἐσφαγμένου ἀπὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου.
And will-worship him all those dwelling on the earth of not-been-written the name in the scroll of-the life of-the lamb of-the been-killed from foundation of-world

9 Εἴ τις ἔχει οὖς ἀκουσάτω.

If anyone has an-ear to hear (Greek: understand).

10 εἴ τις εἰς αἰχμαλωσίαν, εἰς αἰχμαλωσίαν ὑπάγει. εἴ τις ἐν μαχαίρᾳ ἀποκτενεῖ, δεῖ αὐτὸν ἐν μαχαίρᾳ ἀποκτανθῆναι. Ὡδὲ ἐστὶν ἡ ὑπομονὴ καὶ ἡ πίστις τῶν ἁγίων.
if anyone for captivity for captivity he-goes if anyone by a -sword will-kill it-is-necessary by a-sword to-be-killed. Here is the endurance and the faith of-the saints.

In verse 8 PTM changes the word order of the Greek and links the “name not written” to a time at the foundation of the world. By contrast the Greek word order links the killing of the slain lamb to a time at the foundation of the world. These are two different concepts. PTM's paraphrase is not supported by the word order of the Greek text..

For verse 9 PTM changes a statement to become a question. Then PTM adds a common saying. There is no justification in the previous or subsequent Greek words for adding this common saying. How does a general truism about the accepting of the consequences of ones actions relate to the condemnation of the people who kill? By adding this saying there is an error in logic, for if those who worship the beast have no choice, having been left out of the book at the foundation of the world, then they cannot have the free will to “make their bed”. Therefore, the addition of this saying not only defies PTM's own logic, it is also an unwarranted addition to the words of the Greek text.

In verse ten PTM implies that some are destined for prison, whereas the Greek text implies that the person who has the ideal of captivity being good for others will themselves go to captivity and those who decide to kill others with a sword will themselves be killed. To paraphrase it 'they would be hoist on their own petard' or in scriptural terms, there would be 'an eye for an eye'. For saints who are victims of captivity and death by the sword, this justice is of great comfort. PTM misses this concept of justice. By the use of “meanwhile” PTM implies the faithful stand around and be patient, offering no comfort to the faithful. The Greek *Ode Odé* is best translated “here” or “in this”, that is, the previous thought is the reason for endurance and faith. This understanding is sustained by the logic related to justice. People who will wait for justice (an eye for an eye) will endure, they show their faith that justice will finally, in the future, occur.

In this passage PTM adds to the words of Revelation. This addition is not a logical clarification of any of the meaning of the surrounding Greek text. This is only a minor addition, however, the conclusion of this revelation is specific, “If any person shall add unto these things, God shall add unto them the plagues that are written in this book” It would be foolish to add words unnecessarily.

And Jesus answered him, saying, It is written, That man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God. (Luke 4:4)

PTM deletes words:

Jesus answered by quoting Deuteronomy: “it takes more than bread to live”. The Message.

What does it take to live? Peterson's The Message® deletes the answer.