

# **The Bible in Other Words**

A Comparative Analysis of The Message Bible and the New King James Bible

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The Message Bible is a controversial translation. Although translated directly from Hebrew and Greek, the version heavily paraphrases, leading to the question of accuracy. Does it add or omit key information? Does it change the meaning of the scripture? Does it stay relevant? There is some debate online whether or not the Message Bible is good, and some claiming that it is dangerous. Others praise the translation for its comprehensible modern language, helping people who struggle with even the more direct translations, let alone older ones, that are held to high esteem and still used in services across the English-speaking Christendom.

This BA thesis utilises the works of Eugene Nida, who is considered to have pioneered translation studies. Nida's theories of dynamic equivalence and formal equivalence are simplified in this paper, with the two being viewed as opposite extremes.

Due to the scope of this paper, the material has been limited to the section commonly known as The Beatitudes (Matthew 5:1 to 5:12). Although the sample is very small, it will give an idea how much the meaning of the text is changed. It will also open an avenue for further research.

This study found that there are numerous differences (29 minor, 9 major) between the New King James Version and The Message Bible. Some of the differences served the purpose of the author while not changing the meaning. Some were significant, giving an altogether different interpretation of the text.

**Key words:** Bible Translation, Formal Equivalence, Dynamic Equivalence, New King James Version, The Message Bible

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## 1 Introduction

The Bible, although hardly in need of introduction, is one of the most studied and translated literary pieces in the world, and English has become the most popular target language for translations (Daley 2019, 11). When translating, the translator has to make decisions according to the audience, context and purpose of the translation. They will have to choose on the degree of equivalence a translation has in relation to its source text. This is true in translation in general, and especially so in translating a religious text in which case special attention is given to maintain a high degree of formal equivalence, known as word-to-word translation in layman's terms.

There have been instances where the Catholic church or other smaller ecclesiastic bodies and individuals have deemed certain translations of the bible heretical (Bruce 1978, 22). One such case is the author of the first Greek to English translation of the New Testament (which laid the foundation for the later complete English bible King James Version), William Tyndale, was in fact persecuted and martyred by the Roman Catholic Church (Daniell 1994, 2). Since then, despite the general historical hesitance towards translating it, there have been numerous and diverse translations of the Bible (Daley 2019, 11).

The terms *formal equivalence* and *dynamic equivalence* were coined by Eugene Nida. *Equivalence* refers to the translation's (or target text's) sameness or likeness to the original text (or source text) (Nida 1964, 159). Formal equivalence maintains the *form* of the original text, leading to the ideal of word-to-word correspondence among the source and target texts, whereas dynamic or functional equivalence attempts to have the same *function* as the original text. This is often described in layman's terms as *thought-to-thought* translation. The terms *functional* and *dynamic* are often used interchangeably.

The Bible has been translated with varying degrees of formal and dynamic equivalences (Nida 1975, 91). In fact, as Felber recounts (Felber 2023), following Nida's assertion of Bible translatability through *basic kernels*, i.e. the essential part of the text, there has been an "explosion" of new translations in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with some of them straying quite far from the original text (ibid.).

A notable example of a translation following formal equivalence is the New King James Version (henceforth: NKJV). Although not the most recent nor the only formal translation, it is one with a very long history, as it is based on the 17<sup>th</sup> century King James Version. In that time there was no explosion of different translations, but rather in the volume of copies, as the printing press in England was already well established by the time it was published (McGrath,

2001), which certainly played into to the fact of that particular version maintaining its popularity even to this day.

The Message Bible (henceforth: MSG), fully published in 2002, is a translation on the other end of the equivalence spectrum, following dynamic equivalence. The late author, Eugene H. Peterson, a Presbyterian minister and Bible scholar, stated that his goal (NavPress, n.d.; Message Bible, n.d.) was to create an accessible Bible for contemporary readers. Although the MSG was translated directly from the original Hebrew and Greek manuscripts without intermediary English versions (NavPress, n.d.), it employs heavy paraphrasing, leading to concerns about potential additions or omissions and changes in meaning (Subritzky, 2020).

This thesis is a comparative analysis of the English Bible translations MSG and NKJV investigating the variations between them, attempting to answer the questions: What kind of differences there are between MSG and New King James Version? Is information added or omitted? What kind of semantic impact do these differences entail?

This study was inspired by two articles. The first, Schuler, 2016, inspects some of these ambiguities, highlighting verses and passages with omitted and added meanings, much like this thesis. The approach is not so much linguistic, however, but rather theological. The other article, Subritzky, 2020, already referenced in the introduction, similarly compares passages in MSG, but with a more serious tone. Again, it is concerned more about the theological implications rather than linguistics.

In the next chapter I will outline the theoretical framework of this paper, expand on the research goal, as well as briefly discuss possible further research on the topic, given the extremely limited scope of this essay. I will also introduce two papers that are closely related to the topic of this essay.

## 2 Background

As briefly introduced in the previous section, NKJV is a relatively modern translation that attempts to maintain a strictly formal equivalence with extensive footnotes for attested or ambiguous words. It is an update to the King James Version (published in the 17<sup>th</sup> century), following the style of the original translation, while making it easier to understand by replacing dated language. NKJV was fully published in 1982 as a joint effort of over 130 bible scholars.

In the preface of NKJV, the method of translation is named *complete equivalence* (Bible Researcher, 1997), which in the preface is contrasted to dynamic equivalence. Although formal equivalence is not mentioned in the preface, the given description on complete equivalence and contrast to dynamic equivalence allows to equate it with formal equivalence. Furthermore, I was unable to find mentions of complete equivalence in other works.

MSG is a dynamic translation that heavily relies on creative paraphrasing. It shares its Greek and Hebrew source languages (i.e. original language) with NKJV, which is not uncommon regarding modern translations. It is worth mentioning, as some reputable translations have also been made from a pre-2<sup>nd</sup> millennium Latin Vulgate translation. Many people praise MSG as being an easy way to reach the message of scripture (Redden, 2021). It offers a rather unique way to look at the scripture, as the language it uses is intuitively understood by a modern native English speaker.

Although the Message Bible has raised concerns and garnered quite a few critics, many praise it as a much needed Bible version, being easily accessible for the modern reader. Indeed, Peterson said in an interview (NavPress. n.d.) to have been inspired to write the MSG due to his adult audiences' difficulties of "staying awake" when reading a traditional translation.

It is worth mentioning that the speaker in The Beatitudes speaks in parables and allegories. Any dynamic translator thus has to be confident, that their interpretation captures all the meanings of the parable. If only one interpretation is considered, and the whole allegory is replaced with a similar one, do the other possible interpretations carry over to the new allegory? Interpreting allegorical text can be very difficult, particularly so in this instance, as the allegories and metaphors pertain to everyday lives of the peoples in 1<sup>st</sup> century Roman-occupied province of Judea located in modern-day Palestine and Israel, and not to ours' in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries.

Although the amount of research on the topic of The Bible is large, an extensive literary review is far beyond the scope of this study, and thus I will introduce two papers that are especially relevant to the topic. The first study, *Comparison of Polish and English Selected*

*Versions of the Bible: Pragmatics and Semantics in Focus* by Kinga Koltuska (*Language Culture Politics International Journal* 1, no. 1/2023 (November 23, 2023): 63–101) examines how the words *cross* and *Lord* are translated in several of the more popular English and Polish Bible translations. The study states in its introduction, that it was made on the assumption that “the meaning of Biblical texts is directly related to pragmatism but despite similarities and differences between the analysed versions of The Bible, it is possible to find such divergences in relation not only to pragmatics but to semantics, as well.” This assumption relates to the concern of lost meanings when paraphrasing The Bible, which was raised in the introduction chapter of this paper.

Whereas my paper focuses on an extremely narrow slice of the whole of The Bible, Koltuska focuses on two words, the proper noun referring to God, *Jehovah*, *Jah*, *Yahweh* and the noun *cross*, appearing throughout The Bible in several translations (Koltuska 2023, 64). She found that both semantics and pragmatics are interdependently important approaches in Bible translation. Furthermore, translation errors relating to either discipline can have profound and unintentional effects on Bible reading and understanding (Koltuska 2023, 98). Regarding the two words, she found that many translations substitute or omit the proper noun, which she also criticises, stating that the proper use of the name of God is a way for the reader to connect with the “Highest Being” (Ibid.). She also found that the context of the translated word *cross* is not always properly considered, but that “versions of the Bible, where *Jah*’s name or the *cross* [...] are faithfully translated [...] do exist”.

The other relevant source, the book *Truth in translation: Accuracy and Bias in English Translations of the New Testament* by Jason Beduhn (University Press of America, 2003) explores the effects of doctrinal biases in various eminent English translations, and how accurately they represent the original text. Beduhn states, that not only do different translations disagree from one another, the manuscripts used as source texts for translations are themselves imperfect copies of lost originals (Beduhn 2003, 2). The copies of copies likely contain inaccuracies, biases and mistakes as well.

Beduhn makes the claim, that although Bible itself is a very well-studied piece of literature, studies on the quality of biblical translations is severely lacking. Indeed, he raises the concern that the lack in quality can have serious impact in the Christian communities, because, although the idea of *Sola Scriptura* (the Bible alone) is commonly attributed to the Protestant and Reformed denominations, most Christian argumentation and reasoning adheres to the same principle today (Beduhn 2003, viii). This and the former, he argues, can be seen by the large amount of study Bibles, or books on the topic of how to interpret the Bible (ibid.). They too

often rely on contemporary translations, which elevates the point made on the importance of their quality.

Much like in the present paper, Beduhn compares different translations on select passages by displaying the sample(s) next to one another. In his book, he compares the verses John 1:1-2 and argues, how details affirming the translators' own theological biases can be inserted into their translations (Beduhn 2003, 113-115). Although the present paper does not go into detail on what the specific theological implications might be, the concern is acknowledged. Some instances are indeed examined in greater detail and their theological implications become unveiled.

King James Version (the translation NKJV is based on, as stated in the introduction of this paper), is one of the Bible translations Beduhn studies in his book, and although he questions its reliability, this study will not go into much detail on that topic. What is relevant in regard to this study is NKJV's approach of formal equivalence, not its potential insertions on trinitarianism or Christology. This would be, and indeed is (as in the case of Beduhn) a subject for another study, and much beyond the scope of this paper.

In the next chapter I will discuss supplementary materials, such as dictionaries used and methods of verification of the correspondence between NKJV and its original Greek language source text. I will introduce the methodology devised for the purposes of this study.

### 3 Methodology

#### 3.1 Materials

I chose NKJV for the comparison due to its wide recognition and a rather authoritative status as an accurate English representation of the biblical manuscripts. Behind NKJV is a team of 130 Bible scholars, theologians, linguists and scholars of various other fields (Thomas Nelson, n.d.). NKJV is a popular choice for Bible study due to its translation method.

Recognising the possibility of ambiguity in the wording choices of NKJV as well, I will attempt to mitigate those by comparing wordings with *Apostolic Bible Polyglot* (henceforth: ABP), which is an English translation with an interlinear word-for-word Greek translation. This version shows the original Greek word which is also hyperlinked to a dictionary on the same site, supplemented with other uses of the same Greek word throughout the Bible.

Dictionary sources will include Merriam-Webster and Cambridge University dictionary for English, and Bill Mounce Greek Dictionary for Greek.

The two Bible versions (NKJV and MSG) are accessed via the Bible study website biblegateway.com, and ABP via biblehub.com, which both offer parallel viewing of multiple Bible versions, and which the latter features hyperlinks to a dictionary-and-commentary page on biblehub.com. Biblehub.com also includes Strong's concordance numbers (Strong, 1890), an index to search and identify original Greek and Hebrew words in the Bible, which is an important tool for the use of the Greek dictionary.

#### 3.2 Analysis

The following method of analysis was developed for the purposes of this study. The comparison will be done by reviewing the two texts side-by-side and marking differences in wording, moved, added and omitted main words (head of a phrase or a semantic keyword), phrases, clauses and sentences. These differences, referred to also as samples, are marked by a superscripted signature, *A* being minor and *B* major followed by a number, for example: <sup>A1</sup>**sample**. The sample is also bolded to show its extent. The markings will appear on both sides of the table (i.e. both texts) to indicate the corresponding position of the change. Additions and omissions are underlined marked according to their category. Any underlined samples on the NKJV text are omissions, and additions are underlined on the MSG text. Simply put, underlined

sentences indicate that no corresponding sample is found on the other text. The position of the addition/omission is marked on the opposite side with a superscript.

I will classify the differences into two categories, minor differences and major differences. To be classified as a major difference, the verse must add or omit at least one sentence, change the word of multiple keywords or the verse must have a different meaning altogether. Minor category will consist of single differences in wording within a single verse or smaller-than-sentence level additions or omissions. Simple changes in phrases are considered minor. I will also consider changed positions of words and phrases as minor changes, unless more than one sentence apart from its correspondent in the NKJV. Word order in itself and resulting grammatical changes are not considered changes in this examination. Synonyms are viewed as minor changes.

The material consists of 12 verses, which will be divided into three tables. Table 1 shows verses 1 and 2, table 2 verses 3-10 and table 3 shows verses 11 and 12. Verses 1 and 2 describe the setting of the Sermon. They do not contain speech. Verses in table 2 are written as direct speech, and it follows a repeating pattern through all the verses, each one beginning with the words *blessed are*, followed by object, and ending with a clause beginning with the word *For*. 11 and 12 are direct speech also, but the pattern changes. The rationale for this division is due their contents and form. It seems, that the first two verses act as an introduction. They describe the milieu of the speech, who is speaking, and what happened immediately before the speech. The following verses 3-10 contain blessings that begin the Sermon. The writer directly quotes the giver of the Sermon, Jesus Christ. The verses follow a pattern. In the last two verses of 11 and 12 the break the pattern and end the blessings. Verse 11, although beginning according to the pattern does not follow it until the end. Verse 12 no longer follows the pattern.

This analysis will be limited to one of the more well known parts of the Bible, particularly the beginning of Matthew 5, titled *The Beatitudes* in NKJV. The passage serves as the opening to the Sermon on the Mount which is one of the more well known portions in the New Testament. The Sermon itself spans Matt: 5 to 7.

The goal of this thesis is to identify added and omitted meanings in the MSG by analysing its wordings and grammatical structures. I will access the three versions on two bible study webpages, biblegateway.com and biblehub.com. They allow for parallel viewing, offer commentaries and, most importantly, are free-of-charge. The method will be further explained in the third chapter of this paper.

In the next chapter I will apply my research method to the sample text and make comments as I move along.



## 4 Comparison

As mentioned earlier, the collection of passages commonly referred to as *Sermon on the Mount* begins on passage 5 of the Gospel of Matthew, which is titled *The Beatitudes* in NKJV. *Beatitude* (from Latin: *beatus* meaning “blessed” or “happy”) means *a state of utmost bliss* (“beatitude”, *Merriam-Webster*) or *great happiness and calm* (“beatitude”, *Cambridge dictionary*). In MSG, the corresponding part is titled “You’re Blessed”, adding a second-person pronoun to the phrase and thereby creating a more personal emphasis. This choice, particularly with the use of the contraction “You’re,” by making the title lighter, might aim to make the text more relatable and impactful to the reader, encouraging them to interpret themselves as the addressee.

This additional nuance contrasts with ABP as well, where the subject of the verses is expressed in the plural form μακάριοι (μακάριος, *makarios*, “blessed”, Bill Mounce). In the NKJV, the subject is either “the” or “those”. In contrast to the Greek version, the NKJV adds “are”. This is of course due to grammatical differences, as Greek does not require a copula (Smith 1873, s.v. “944”). However, in verses 11 and 12, the second-person plural explicitly appears with the copular verb “are” (ἐστε) and imperative verbs such as rejoice (χαίrete, *khairete*) and be [exceedingly glad/exult] (ἀγαλλιᾶσθε, *agalliasthe*).

### 4.1 Table 1

New King James Version	The Message
<sup>A1</sup> The Beatitudes	<sup>A1</sup> You’re Blessed
1 And seeing <sup>A2</sup> the <sup>A3</sup> <b>multitudes</b> , He went up on a <sup>A4</sup> <b>mountain</b> , and when <sup>A8</sup> <b>He was seated</b> <sup>A5</sup> <b>His disciples</b> <sup>A6</sup> <b>came to</b> Him.	1-2 When Jesus saw <sup>A2</sup> <u>his ministry drawing</u> <sup>A3</sup> <b>huge crowds</b> , he climbed a <sup>A4</sup> <b>hillside</b> . <sup>A5</sup> <b>Those who were apprenticed to him</b> , <u>the committed</u> , <sup>A6</sup> <b>climbed with him</b> . <sup>A7</sup> <u>Arriving at a quiet place</u> , <sup>A8</sup> <b>he sat down</b> and <sup>A9</sup> taught his <sup>A10</sup> <b>climbing companions</b> . This is what he said:
2 <sup>A9</sup> <u>Then He opened His mouth</u> and taught <sup>A10</sup> <b>them</b> , saying:	

Number of changes: 10.

The number of changes in verses 1 and 2 is 10, none of which I have classified as major. Sample A2 does not seem to describe a similar causal relationship between *seeing the multitudes* and *going up on a mountain* as MSG does with *when Jesus saw his ministry drawing huge crowds, he climbed a hillside*. The added context of *his ministry* is best interpreted as Jesus' works of teaching, preaching and healing, as in the next sentence the disciples are referred to as *those who were apprenticed to him*. It acts as explanation to why there is a crowd following him, serving to increase clarity. "Multitudes" and "huge crowds" are synonyms, although the latter carries an affectionate, almost childlike tone, also adding to the verse's clarity.

The Greek word ὄρος translates to both "mountain" and "hill" (Bill Mounce). MSG uses the word "hillside" instead of "mountain" or "hill". It is worth noting the significance of NKJV's wording in this case, as it may carry an allusion to the biblical symbolism of mountains, such as Mount Sinai, where the Old Law was given to Moses. This could emphasize the significance of the location in the Sermon on the Mount as the place where the New Law is delivered. By choosing "mountain", the NKJV may aim to thematically connect this scene with the Old Testament, adding an interpretive layer to the text. To confirm this, however, one would need to examine the word ὄρος in this context more closely, as well as consider parallel accounts in the Gospels of Mark and Luke. Concerning the traditional Mount of Beatitudes, Pulpit Commentary reads (Spence & Exell 1974, Volume 15, Matthew): "(1)"τὸ ὄρος" is equivalent to "the mountain" as a distinct name, and this mountain alone, with the exception of Tabor which is too distant, stands separate from the uniform barrier of hills round (sic) the lake". Furthermore, the significant point about the hill/mountain is that it had a flat summit wherein the crowd would gather (ibid.). As such, the wording "hillside" is here considered a change in meaning, as there is no indication of the original text referring to a side of hill or a mountain.

Relying again on Pulpit Commentary (ibid.), the meaning of the phrase *then he opened his mouth* is understood to indicate deliberate and intentional speech, rather than "utterance of chance". Considering MSG's goal, the omission here is quite justified and harmless, as the significance of the phrase is not obvious to the modern reader and it does not remove any information. One could hardly argue that its omission would lead the modern reader to assume that ventriloquism was one of Jesus' works.

## 4.2 Table 2

New King James Version	The Message
3 “Blessed are the <sup>B1</sup> poor in spirit, <sup>B2</sup> For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.	3 “You’re blessed when <sup>B1</sup> you’re at the end of your rope. <sup>B2</sup> With less of you there is more of God and his rule.
4 Blessed are those who <sup>A11</sup> mourn, For they <sup>A12</sup> shall be comforted <sup>A13</sup> __.	4 “You’re blessed when <sup>A11</sup> you feel you’ve lost what is most dear to you. <sup>A12</sup> Only then can you be embraced <sup>A13</sup> <u>by the One most dear to you.</u>
5 Blessed are the <sup>B3</sup> meek, For <sup>A14</sup> they shall inherit the earth.	5 “You’re blessed when <sup>B3</sup> you’re content with just who you are—no more, no less. That’s the moment <sup>A14</sup> you find yourselves proud owners of everything that can’t be bought.
6 Blessed are those who <sup>A15</sup> hunger and thirst for <sup>B4</sup> righteousness, <sup>A16</sup> For they shall be filled.	6 “You’re blessed when <sup>A15</sup> you’ve worked up a good appetite for <sup>B4</sup> God. <sup>A16</sup> He’s food and drink in the best meal you’ll ever eat.
7 Blessed are the <sup>A17</sup> merciful, <sup>A18</sup> For they shall obtain mercy.	7 “You’re blessed when you <sup>A17</sup> care. <sup>A18</sup> At the moment of being ‘care-full,’ you find yourselves cared for.
8 Blessed are the <sup>A19</sup> __ <sup>A20</sup> pure in heart, For they shall see God.	8 “You’re blessed when <sup>A19</sup> <u>you get your inside world—your mind and heart—</u> <sup>A20</sup> <u>put right.</u> Then you can see God <sup>A</sup> <u>in the outside world.</u>
9 Blessed are the <sup>A21</sup> peacemakers <sup>A22</sup> __, For they <sup>B5</sup> shall be called <sup>A23</sup> sons of God.	9 “You’re blessed when you can show people how to <sup>A21</sup> cooperate <sup>A22</sup> <u>instead of compete or fight.</u> <sup>B5</sup> <u>That’s when you discover who you really are,</u> and <sup>A23</sup> your place in God’s family.
10 Blessed are those who are <sup>A24</sup> persecuted for <sup>B6</sup> righteousness’ sake, For theirs <sup>A25</sup> __ is the kingdom of heaven.	10 “You’re blessed when your <sup>A24</sup> commitment to <sup>B6</sup> God provokes persecution. The persecution drives you <sup>A25</sup> <u>even deeper</u> into God’s kingdom.

Number of samples: 20, of which 6 are major.

Through verses 3 to 10 there are multiple idioms and colloquialisms. Sample B1 in NKJV reads “*Blessed are the poor in spirit, ...*” whereas in MSG it reads “*You’re blessed when you’re at the end of your rope*”. The two versions do not equate. According to Cambridge dictionary, the idiom *at the end of your rope* means *to have no more patience or strength*. Comparing it to *poor in spirit* in NKJV and to *πτωχοί τῷ πνεύματι* (poor in the spirit) in ABP, it seems to give a different impression. Pope Francis discusses the verse in his homilies in 2020 (Pope Francis Homilies, 2020) saying “*In this lies true freedom: those who have this power of humility, service and brotherhood are free.*” Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges offers comments (Carr, 1881) on the phrase as follows: “*Opposed to the spiritually proud, the just who need no repentance. St Luke omits “in spirit,” showing that the literal poor are primarily meant, St Matthew shows that they are not exclusively meant.*” So, by definition, *opposed to the spiritually proud* are the spiritually humble. Humility seems to be the key message in both sources. Were the verse undisputably and *primarily* referring to literal destitution, as the latter source interprets Luke’s description of the same event to indicate, the MSG version would fit better. Although destitution and even *being at the end of one’s rope* do indeed make one humble, the phrase is, nonetheless, a major modification to the common understanding of what was originally written and meant.

In MSG sample B2 seems to refer to the idea of letting one’s old self die so that they may be reborn in Christ (Romans 6:6-7, Ephesians 4:22-24). Interestingly, it seems to also make a connection to humility. Considering that verses often overlap in MSG, it would make sense. The mention of “*God and his rule*” in MSG would then correspond to “*kingdom of heaven*” in NKJV. Maybe a more proper way to interpret the two verses would be to consider sample B1 in MSG as addition and sample B2 corresponding to both B1 and B2 in NKJV. The assumption I made earlier (old self dying) does however require the reader to be aware of the whole. For this reason, and considering the next verse, I see no need to adjust the categorisation.

Sample B3 in NKJV reads “*Blessed are the meek*”. *Meek* is a difficult word, as both the Merriam-Webster dictionary and Cambridge dictionary give multiple definitions: *gentle, quiet, unwilling to disagree or fight or to strongly support personal ideas and opinions*. In ABP the translation from Greek is *gentle*. Again, MSG makes an interpretation: “*You’re blessed when you’re content with just who you are — no more, no less*”. This seems to correspond to the idea of humbleness, rather than the primary dictionary definitions. The Bible Study Tools article on the topic of Matt. 5:5 explores definitions, commentaries and translations of the word *meek*, and comments on the MSG version as follows: “*As for the Message translation, it’s interesting to note that the translators interpreted meekness to mean accepting the gifts God has given to*

us. The opposite of meekness does also mean envious. When we don't envy other's gifts, we embrace who God created us to be and his distinct purpose for our lives" (Bolinger 2023). What is also interesting to note is that MSG does not use the word *meek*, which, through its antonyms, Bolinger uses to interpret what was meant in MSG. Most likely of course the author of MSG was aware of NKJV, or at least other translations that use the word *meek* in this verse. It is worth to consider also the negative connotation of *meek* in today's English, which might have influenced Peterson's decision. There is no particular reason to use it either, as the Greek word "πραεῖς" (praeis) can be translated also as *gentle* and *humble* (Bill Mounce), the latter being what the MSG sample B3 mostly resembles. The interpretive choice Peterson made here however is enough to classify this change as a major change.

There is not much to be said about verses 6-9. Thematically the samples correspond, they are quite similar in length, and none of the samples require investigation to their meanings, apart from sample B4. MSG seems to substitute the word *righteousness* with *God*. The decision is not obvious, unless one assumes the word *righteousness* is less ambiguous than *God*. As far as change in meaning, it is an addition. It could be argued that Peterson's decision here comes from the idea of *God equals righteousness*, but one could also argue that *God* is more than *righteousness*. This same change in wording appears in B6.

### 4.3 Table 3

New King James Version	The Message
<p>11 <sup>A1</sup> _ Blessed are you when they revile and <sup>A2</sup> <b>persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely</b> <sup>A3</sup> <b>for my sake.</b> 12 <sup>B1</sup> _ Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, <sup>B2</sup> _ <sup>A4</sup> <b>for great is your reward in heaven,</b> <sup>B3</sup> _ for so they persecuted the prophets <sup>A5</sup> _ who were before you.</p>	<p>11-12 <sup>A1</sup> <b><u>Not only that</u></b> – count yourselves blessed every time people <sup>A2</sup> <b>put you down or throw you out or speak lies about you</b> <sup>A3</sup> <b>to discredit me.</b> <sup>B1</sup> <b><u>What it means is that the truth is too close for comfort and they are uncomfortable.</u></b> You can be glad when that happens – give a cheer, even! – <sup>B2</sup> <b><u>for though they don't like it, I do!</u></b> <sup>A4</sup> <b><u>And all heaven applauds.</u></b> <sup>B3</sup> <b><u>And know that you are in good company.</u></b> My prophets and <sup>A5</sup> <b><u>witnesses</u></b> have always gotten into this kind of trouble.</p>

The total number of changes is 8 of which 3 are major.

Highlighted in table 3 are the differences in verses 11 and 12. As pointed out earlier, the person changes in NKJV. In contrast to 3<sup>rd</sup> person plural in verses 3-10 (“*the + [noun.3PL]*” and “*those who...*”) the 2<sup>nd</sup> person pronoun *you* is used, which ABP shows to be plural. The approach Peterson took in verses 3-10 might be influenced by this shift, as if in the NKJV the speaker in those verses meant to say: “*Blessed are those of you*” which would bear a strong resemblance to his phrase “*You’re blessed when*”. This assessment is further supported by how Peterson begins the verse 11 with the discourse marker “*Not only that –*”, which makes a distinction to the previous verses, and adds anticipation. In NKJV this distinction is accomplished with the earlier-mentioned shift in person.

Similarly to verses 1 and 2, MSG does not clearly separate 11 and 12, with the line between the two running between *discredit me* and *You can be glad*. The sentence “*What it means is that the truth is too close for comfort and they are uncomfortable*” seems to be in its entirety added information. It gives an explanation for the actions of *reviling* and *persecuting* against the addressees, again, with the effect of rendering the tone more personal. Such explanation, however, is completely absent in both the NKJV and ABP. An example of omission too can be found in these verses, as the MSG does not mention any reward, like NKJV and ABP do, unless one argued that the reward is “*applause of heaven*” and the knowledge of being in “*good company*”.

Finally, at the end of the passage in MSG, the sentence reads as something written afterwards, as if alluding to the coming persecution of Jesus’ disciples and later on the early Christians: *My prophets and witnesses have always gotten into this kind of trouble*. It could of course refer to what is said earlier, in verse 11: *Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you*, if one were to interpret the verbs as being in the future tense. But, as seen in ABP, the verbs *ὀνειδίσωσιν* (revile / insult; Greek Dictionary, Smith, William) and *διώξωσιν* (persecute; *ibid.*) are in the aorist tense, which usually describes past events and roughly corresponds to English simple past tense, and is contrasted by the marked future tense in Greek.

## 5 Conclusion

This paper set out to compare the Bible translations MSG and NKJV in the section known as The Beatitudes, or Matthew 5:1-12. It was inspired by several articles either praising MSG for its intelligibility and comprehensiveness, or criticising its colloquial and contemporary language and potential theological implications thereof. The study questions, as stated in the introduction, were as follows: What kind of differences there are between MSG and New King James Version? Is information added or omitted? What kind of semantic and pragmatic impact do these differences entail?

As demonstrated in the analysis, there are numerous differences between the MSG and NKJV, including both additions and omissions that are not found neither in the NKJV nor the interlinear study Bible, ABP. Some of these additions are more valid than others, not distorting the meaning and indeed making it more comprehensible and emotionally engaging, which is, after all, the stated intention of the MSG's author Eugene Peterson. This sentiment is echoed by Koltuska's findings on the importance of pragmatics in biblical translations. She argued that it is important to consider the pragmatics approach in translation to allow the reader to connect with the text (Koltuska, 2023, p. 98). The implication is, that a strictly formal translation risks alienating the reader from Scripture.

That being said, the concern, that too much is changed in MSG is not unfounded either. There were a total of 29 minor differences and 9 major differences, 38 in total. The major changes either leave the reader with a different understanding of what was originally written, or omit key information. Some of the colloquialisms are ambiguous with regards to the original intention and, on a more subjective note, modern word choices do sometimes feel out of place, as was pointed out in some of the online criticism I mentioned in chapter 2 of this essay. Considering the brevity of The Beatitudes the amount of discrepancies is quite large. Some parts of the Bible are even denser, and their multiplicity in meaning is often under many layers of symbolism, that point to different parts of the Bible. These threads of meaning are difficult to follow in their own right, and if not translated very carefully such threads might be lost. In the context of Beduhn's argument, these threads are inevitably lost in the process of translation. For that reason, it is important to study the source texts, to understand the meaning and the context of any given word, sentence or verse when translating ancient scripture.

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