

The Prologue of John in Syriac, Arabic and English

John 1:1–18 · Peshitta · Smith–Van Dyck · World English Bible

A typesetting sample by Tymofii Shustov

About this sample

A self-initiated typesetting sample: three versions of John 1:1–18 set verse by verse, followed by notes in English with Syriac and Arabic words in the running text and in the footnotes. The notes are the editor's; the biblical texts are unchanged.

Sources. Syriac: the Peshitta New Testament from the SEDRA 3.0 database (George A. Kiraz and James W. Bennett), as published by the ETCBC at github.com/ETCBC/syrnt (MIT licence), unvocalised. Arabic: the Smith–Van Dyck translation (1865), public domain, from ebible.org. English: the World English Bible, public domain, from ebible.org; its footnotes are not printed in the table.

Type. Gentium Book for Latin and Greek, Amiri for Arabic with full vocalisation, Noto Sans Syriac for Syriac (Estrangela); all under the SIL Open Font License. Set in Adobe InDesign with the World-Ready Paragraph Composer.

Accessibility. The PDF is tagged: headings with matching bookmarks, paragraphs, a table with column headers and the verse numbers as row headers, footnotes linked both ways, and a language for every Syriac and Arabic passage. Every Syriac and Arabic passage also carries its text in reading order for screen readers and for copying in Acrobat; other viewers may copy right-to-left text in visual order. Running heads and page numbers are artifacts. Checked with PAC 2024 against PDF/UA-1 and WCAG 2.2, and with veraPDF.

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John 1:1-18

Verse	English (WEB)	Arabic (Van Dyck)	Syriac (Peshitta)
1	In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.	فِي الْبَدْءِ كَانَ الْكَلِمَةُ، وَالْكَلِمَةُ كَانَ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ، وَكَانَ الْكَلِمَةُ اللَّهُ.	ܐܡܪܐ ܕܠܥܠܡܐ ܕܡܬܬܝܠܡܕܐ ܕܠܥܠܡܐ ܕܡܬܬܝܠܡܕܐ ܕܠܥܠܡܐ ܕܡܬܬܝܠܡܕܐ ܕܠܥܠܡܐ ܕܡܬܬܝܠܡܕܐ ܕܠܥܠܡܐ ܕܡܬܬܝܠܡܕܐ
2	The same was in the beginning with God.	هَذَا كَانَ فِي الْبَدْءِ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ.	ܡܬܬܝܠܡܕܐ ܕܠܥܠܡܐ ܕܡܬܬܝܠܡܕܐ ܕܠܥܠܡܐ ܕܡܬܬܝܠܡܕܐ
3	All things were made through him. Without him, nothing was made that has been made.	كُلُّ شَيْءٍ بِهِ كَانَ، وَبِغَيْرِهِ لَمْ يَكُنْ شَيْءٌ مِّمَّا كَانَ.	ܠܥܠܡܐ ܕܡܬܬܝܠܡܕܐ ܕܠܥܠܡܐ ܕܡܬܬܝܠܡܕܐ ܕܠܥܠܡܐ ܕܡܬܬܝܠܡܕܐ
4	In him was life, and the life was the light of men.	فِيهِ كَانَتْ الْحَيَاةُ، وَالْحَيَاةُ كَانَتْ نُورَ النَّاسِ،	ܡܬܬܝܠܡܕܐ ܕܠܥܠܡܐ ܕܡܬܬܝܠܡܕܐ ܕܠܥܠܡܐ ܕܡܬܬܝܠܡܕܐ ܕܠܥܠܡܐ ܕܡܬܬܝܠܡܕܐ
5	The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness hasn't overcome it.	وَالنُّورُ يَظِيءُ فِي الظُّلُمَةِ، وَالظُّلُمَةُ لَمْ تَدْرِ كَهُ.	ܡܬܬܝܠܡܕܐ ܕܠܥܠܡܐ ܕܡܬܬܝܠܡܕܐ ܕܠܥܠܡܐ ܕܡܬܬܝܠܡܕܐ ܕܠܥܠܡܐ ܕܡܬܬܝܠܡܕܐ
6	There came a man sent from God, whose name was John.	كَانَ إِنْسَانٌ مُرْسَلٌ مِنَ اللَّهِ أَسْمُهُ يُوحَنَّا.	ܡܬܬܝܠܡܕܐ ܕܠܥܠܡܐ ܕܡܬܬܝܠܡܕܐ ܕܠܥܠܡܐ ܕܡܬܬܝܠܡܕܐ
7	The same came as a witness, that he might testify about the light, that all might believe through him.	هَذَا جَاءَ لِلشَّهَادَةِ لِيَشْهَدَ لِلنُّورِ، لِكَيْ يُؤْمِنَ الْكُلُّ بِوَأَسْطَتِهِ.	ܡܬܬܝܠܡܕܐ ܕܠܥܠܡܐ ܕܡܬܬܝܠܡܕܐ ܕܠܥܠܡܐ ܕܡܬܬܝܠܡܕܐ ܕܠܥܠܡܐ ܕܡܬܬܝܠܡܕܐ

Verse	English (WEB)	Arabic (Van Dyck)	Syriac (Peshitta)
8	He was not the light, but was sent that he might testify about the light.	لَمْ يَكُنْ هُوَ النُّورُ، بَلْ لِيَشْهَدَ لِلنُّورِ.	לֹא מֵהַ מְסִיחָא אֱלֵא דִנְשַׁמְדָּה מֵהַ מְסִיחָא
9	The true light that enlightens everyone was coming into the world.	كَانَ النُّورُ الْحَقِيقِيُّ الَّذِي يُنِيرُ كُلَّ إِنْسَانٍ آتِيًا إِلَى الْعَالَمِ.	אֱמֵתָא, מֵהַ מְסִיחָא מֵהַ מְסִיחָא דִבְרִיכָא דִנְשַׁמְדָּה לְחַלְתָּ דִאֱמֵתָא לְחַלְתָּ
10	He was in the world, and the world was made through him, and the world didn't recognize him.	كَانَ فِي الْعَالَمِ، وَكُنَّ الْعَالَمُ بِهِ، وَلَمْ يَعْرِفْهُ الْعَالَمُ.	חַלְתָּ מֵהַ מְסִיחָא כִּאֲדֵם מֵהַ מְסִיחָא לֹא יָדַעְתָּ
11	He came to his own, and those who were his own didn't receive him.	إِلَى خَاصَّتِهِ جَاءَ، وَخَاصَّتُهُ لَمْ تَقْبَلْهُ.	לְדִלְתָּ אֱמֵתָא מְסִיחָא, לֹא קִבְּלֵתָּ
12	But as many as received him, to them he gave the right to become God's children, to those who believe in his name:	وَأَمَّا كُلُّ الَّذِينَ قَبِلُوهُ فَاعْطَاهُمْ سُلْطَانًا أَنْ يَصِيرُوا أَوْلَادَ اللَّهِ، أَيِ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ بِاسْمِهِ.	אֲמַלְתָּ דִּם דִּמְסִיחָא, מִכַּח לְמַלְתָּ אֱמֵתָא דִכְסָא דִאֱמֵתָא מֵהַ מְסִיחָא לְאֲמַלְתָּ דִכְסָא מְסִיחָא בְּחַיָּתָא
13	who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.	الَّذِينَ وُلِدُوا لَيْسَ مِنْ دَمٍ، وَلَا مِنْ مَشِيئَةِ جَسَدٍ، وَلَا مِنْ مَشِيئَةِ رَجُلٍ، بَلْ مِنْ اللَّهِ.	אֲמַלְתָּ דִלְתָּ מֵהַ מְסִיחָא מֵהַ מְסִיחָא דִכְסָא מֵהַ מְסִיחָא מֵהַ מְסִיחָא מֵהַ מְסִיחָא מֵהַ מְסִיחָא
14	The Word became flesh and lived among us. We saw his glory, such glory as of the only born Son of the Father, full of grace and truth.	وَالْكَلِمَةُ صَارَ جَسَدًا وَحَلَّ بَيْنَنَا، وَرَأَيْنَا مَجْدَهُ، مَجْدًا كَمَا لَوْحِيدٍ مِنَ الْآبِ، مَلُوءًا نِعْمَةً وَحَقًّا.	מְסִיחָא מֵהַ מְסִיחָא מֵהַ מְסִיחָא מֵהַ מְסִיחָא מֵהַ מְסִיחָא מֵהַ מְסִיחָא מֵהַ מְסִיחָא

Verse	English (WEB)	Arabic (Van Dyck)	Syriac (Peshitta)
15	John testified about him. He cried out, saying, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me has surpassed me, for he was before me.'"	يُوحَنَّا شَهِدَ لَهُ وَنَادَى قَائِلًا: «هَذَا هُوَ الَّذِي قُلْتُ عَنْهُ: إِنَّ الَّذِي يَأْتِي بَعْدِي صَارَ قُدَّامِي، لِأَنَّهُ كَانَ قَبْلِي».	ܡܫܥ ܡܨܚܕ ܚܠܡܐ, ܡܨܚܐ ܡܬܥܐ ܡܡܐ ܕܐܚܝܐ ܕܚܝܐ, ܐܘܬܐ ܡܡܐ ܐܠܡ ܡܕܢܐ ܡܠܐ ܕܡܕܢܐ ܡܡܐ ܡܢܐ
16	From his fullness we all received grace upon grace.	وَمِنْ مَلَأَتِهِ نَحْنُ جَمِيعًا أَخَذْنَا، وَنِعْمَةً فَوْقَ نِعْمَةٍ.	ܡܡܥ ܡܠܬܐ ܡܡܥ ܡܡ ܚܠܡ ܡܡܥ ܡܠܬܐ ܡܠܬܐ ܡܠܬܐ ܡܠܬܐ
17	For the law was given through Moses. Grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ.	لَأنَّ النَّامُوسَ مُوسَى أَعْطَى، أَمَّا النِّعْمَةُ وَالْحَقُّ فَيَسُوعُ الْمَسِيحُ صَارَا.	ܡܠܐ ܕܢܥܡܬܐ ܚܕܐ ܡܡܥ ܐܘܬܡܬ ܒܝܕܐ ܕܡ ܡܠܬܐ ܡܠܬܐ ܚܕܐ ܡܡܥ ܡܡܥܐ ܡܡܥ
18	No one has seen God at any time. The only born Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, has declared him.	اَللّٰهُ لَمْ يَرَهُ أَحَدٌ قَطُّ. الْإِبْنُ الْوَحِيدُ الَّذِي هُوَ فِي حِضْنِ الْأَبِ هُوَ خَبَر.	ܐܠܡܐ ܠܐ ܡܐ ܐܬܐ ܡܡܬܐ ܡܡܬܐ ܐܠܡܐ ܡܡ ܕܐܬܡܬܐ, ܚܝܚܐ ܕܐܚܡܬܐ, ܡܡ ܐܬܬܬܐ

Notes on the vocabulary

Both versions render λόγος with a feminine noun, Syriac ܡܠܬܐ (*melltā*) and Arabic ٱلْكَلِمَةُ (*al-kalima*), and both refuse to let grammar decide its gender. The Peshitta says ܠܗ ܡܠܬܐ, with the masculine suffix of ‘he was’; Van Dyck writes ڪَانَ ٱلْكَلِمَةُ with a masculine verb, where agreement would require ڪَانَتْ.¹

For ἐσκήνωσεν in v. 14 the versions part company. Van Dyck has the plain وَحَلَّ بَيْنَنَا, ‘and dwelt among us’. The Peshitta has ܠܗ ܐܓܓܝܢ ܒܢܐܢܐ (*w-aggen ban*), from a verb that also means ‘to overshadow’: it is the word of the angel to Mary in Luke 1:35.²

In v. 5 the two versions use cognate verbs from the root *d-r-k*, ‘to reach, overtake’: Syriac ܠܗ ܕܪܝܚܐ and Arabic لَمْ تُدْرِكْهُ. Both keep the double sense of κατέλαβεν, which the World English Bible renders ‘overcome’ and notes could also be ‘comprehended’.

Syriac also varies where Greek does not. ‘Grace and truth’ is ܠܗܘܬܐ ܠܗܘܬܐ in v. 14 but ܠܗܘܬܐ ܕܗܘܬܐ in v. 17, with another word for truth and the order reversed. Van Dyck keeps one pair: ٱلنِّعْمَةُ ٱلْحَقُّ and ٱلنِّعْمَةُ ٱلْحَقُّ.

In v. 18 the versions follow different Greek readings. The Peshitta reads ܠܗ ܡܠܬܐ ܥܠܝܐ, ‘the only-begotten God’, the reading printed in NA28 (μονογενής θεός); Van Dyck’s ٱلْوَٰحِدُ ٱلْأَبْنُ, ‘the only Son’, follows the Byzantine υἱός, as does the World English Bible.³

1 The agreement holds in v. 14: ܠܗ ܡܠܬܐ ܠܗܘܬܐ, with masculine ܠܗ rather than ܗܝܬܐ, and ܠܗ ܡܠܬܐ ܠܗܘܬܐ, with masculine ܠܗ.

2 Luke 1:35: ܠܗ ܐܓܓܝܢ ܒܢܐܢܐ; Van Dyck: وَقُوَّةُ ٱلْعَلِيِّ تَظِلُّكَ, ‘and the power of the Most High will overshadow you’.

3 The World English Bible notes the variant at 1:18: “NU reads ‘God.’”