WHO SAID JOHN 3:16?

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Most people get the idea that translation involves more than just changing a word in one language for another word that means the same thing in a different languages. You just don't get exact equivalence of meaning between languages in this way. You have to translate in order to convey meaning, not just to line up words against each other.

However, there is another complication that translators have to deal with; punctuation. In English, the placement of commas, quotation marks and the like carries a lot of meaning.



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This means, that among other things, Bible translators have to work out how to punctuate the text they are working on. For the most part, this is straightforward, but there are some interesting problems.

For example, take a look at John Chapter 3. In verse 9, Nicodemus asks Jesus a question and Jesus starts to respond in verse 10. In terms of punctuation, this means that you have to open the quote marks, for Jesus speech in verse 10, but where do you close them? There is nothing in the text which

tells us when Jesus stops speaking.

The NLT (which I have linked to) closes Jesus quote at verse 21. However, if you read the text carefully, verses 16 and 17 could very easily be a comment by the Author (John) on Jesus words. John does throw in theological observations in the text of his Gospel (see for example 2:21) and this section could easily be one of those.

There is absolutely nothing in the original text that tells us with any degree of certainty when Jesus stopped speaking and when/if John's editorial voice started. All translations into English have to make a choice on this issue. Our punctuation system means that you can't simply ignore it and let the reader decide.

There are some tricky issues in translating John 3, which I looked at briefly a while ago. However, one of the biggest problems with John 3:16 is working out who said it in the first place.

A couple of further reflections; firsly, I know that I am one of the worst punctuators in the business, you don't need to remind me of that. Secondly, I'm sure I blogged on this years ago, but I can't find the post. So, if this feels like dÃ©ja vu, it probably is.Â