

# THE ORIGINAL CHAPTER BREAKS IN THE BOOK OF MORMON

The earliest editions of the Book of Mormon did not have the same chapter divisions as our modern editions. For example, in the 1830 edition, the first chapter of 1 Nephi included all of what is now labeled 1 Nephi 1–5 (the entire episode of obtaining the brass plates). There is considerable evidence that these original chapter breaks were written on the gold plates by the original authors themselves (although they did not number the breaks).

Book	# Modern Chapters	# Original Chapters
1 Nephi	22	7
2 Nephi	33	15
Jacob	7	5
Enos	1	1
Jarom	1	1
Omni	1	1
W of M	1	1
Mosiah	29	13
Alma	63	30
Helaman	16	5
3 Nephi	30	14
4 Nephi	1	1
Mormon	9	4
Ether	15	6
Moroni	10	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>239</b>	<b>114</b>

## WHERE THE CHAPTER BREAKS CAME FROM

The modern chapter and verse divisions were devised by the apostle Orson Pratt in 1879.<sup>1</sup> He broke up the original chapters into shorter ones about the length of conventional Bible chapters, and he added verse divisions. For long quotations (e.g., when Jesus Christ quotes Isaiah at 3 Nephi 22) he made the verse numbering match that in the Bible, which makes it easier to compare these parallel passages.

<sup>1</sup> David J. Whittaker, "Orson Pratt: Early Advocate of the Book of Mormon," *Ensign*, Apr 1984.

The original chapter divisions, however, were apparently devised by the original authors Nephi, Jacob, Mormon, and Moroni. Manuscript evidence suggests that the gold plates themselves had "some visual indication at the end of a section."<sup>2</sup> (The original editions were not divided into verses; the typesetter, John H. Gilbert, divided them into unnumbered paragraphs.)

## WHY THIS MATTERS

Since these section dividers are part of the original text, they can be useful in a number of ways when studying the Book of Mormon. For one thing, they can aid in understanding how the authors were structuring their writings and in revealing connections between passages.

For example, the episode of Alma's mission to the Zoramites (Alma 31–35) is part of a larger unit according to the original chapter breaks. That unit also included Alma 30, the episode with Korihor. This can imply that Mormon intended Korihor's story to be sort of introduction to the mission to the Zoramites, and invites us to find relationships between the two accounts.

## USING THIS TABLE

The following table lists all the original chapter breaks and their locations in the text (using modern chapter-verse references). Throughout this handout, original chapter numbers are given in Roman numerals; modern chapter numbers are given in Arabic numerals, as is customary. The original chapter breaks are displayed in the margins in the Structured Edition of the Book of Mormon.

<sup>2</sup> Royal Skousen, "How Joseph Smith Translated the Book of Mormon: Evidence from the Original Manuscript," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* (Provo: Maxwell Institute, 1998) v7 n1, pp. 22–31. The article explains his reasons for coming to this conclusion.

Book	Original chapter	Modern reference
<b>1 Nephi</b>	I	1
	II	6
	III	10
	IV	15
	V	16
	VI	19:22
	VII	22
<b>2 Nephi</b>	I	1
	II	3
	III	4
	IV	5
	V	6
	VI	9
	VII	10
	VIII	11
	IX	16
	X	23
	XI	25
	XII	28
	XIII	31
	XIV	32
	XV	33
<b>Jacob</b>	I	1
	II	2
	III	4
	IV	6
	V	7
<b>Enos</b>	I	1
<b>Jarom</b>	I	1
<b>Omni</b>	I	1

<b>W of M</b>	I	1
<b>Mosiah</b>	I	1
	II	4
	III	5
	IV	6
	V	7
	VI	9
	VII	11
	VIII	13:25
	IX	17
	X	22
	XI	23
	XII	28
	XIII	28:20
<b>Alma</b>	I	1
	II	4
	III	5
	IV	6
	V	7
	VI	8
	VII	9
	VIII	10
	IX	12
	X	13:10
	XI	16
	XII	17
	XIII	21
	XIV	23
XV	27	
XVI	30	
XVII	36	
XVIII	38	
XIX	39	

	XX	43
	XXI	45
	XXII	50
	XXIII	51
	XXIV	52
	XXV	54
	XXVI	56
	XXVII	59
	XXVIII	61
	XXIX	62
	XXX	63
<b>Helaman</b>	I	1
	II	3
	III	7
	IV	11
	V	13
<b>3 Nephi</b>	I	1
	II	3
	III	6
	IV	8
	V	11
	VI	13:25
	VII	15
	VIII	17
	IX	19
	X	21:22

	XI	23:14	
	XII	26:6	
	XIII	27:23	
	XIV	30	
<b>4 Nephi</b>	I	1	
	<b>Mormon</b>	I	1
		II	4
		III	6
	IV	8	
<b>Ether</b>	I	1	
	II	5	
	III	6	
	IV	9	
	V	12	
	VI	13	
<b>Moroni</b>	I	1	
	II	2	
	III	3	
	IV	4	
	V	5	
	VI	6	
	VII	7	
	VIII	8	
	IX	9	
	X	10	

- Did Orson Pratt use every original break as a modern break?
- Do any modern chapters skip over an original break? Which book has the most instances of this?
- While most modern chapters take up less text than an original chapter, do any modern chapters cover more than one original chapter?
- Were any books unaffected by the modern chapter numbering?

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