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A WORLD-WIDE BROADCAST

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Dear Friend:

When was the Bible divided into chapters and verses?

The system of dividing the Bible into chapters and verses is man-made and of comparatively recent origin. The Bible, as inspired by God, had no such divisions.

Chapters and verses are helpful in finding passages in the Bible, but the division into chapters and verses has often obscured the meaning of Scripture by breaking sentences in the middle or by separating thoughts that should be joined together. Too many people merely lift a verse out of its setting and read a false meaning into it because they don't read the context in surrounding verses.

Perhaps the first attempted division of the Bible was undertaken by the early Jews. During the time following the Babylonian captivity, they marked off the scrolls into divisions and subdivisions. This system was quite different from the one that is in use today, however.

The first modern system of dividing the Bible into sections was devised by Cardinal Hugo in the mid-thirteenth century. Hugo, who was compiling a concordance to the Latin Vulgate Version of the Bible, found it necessary to divide the Bible into sections. These sections basically became the chapters that we are acquainted with today. As yet there were no divisions into verses.

Later, in 1445, Mordecai Nathan, a Jew, divided the Hebrew Old Testament into chapters. He and a later scholar by the name of Athias are accredited with the further breakdown of the Old Testament chapters into verses.

In 1551 the New Testament was similarly subdivided into verses. This work was accomplished by the famous English printer, Robert Stephens, while riding on horseback from Switzerland to France. Ever since that time, the Bible has retained the present chapter and verse system.

Being man-devised, such a system is not perfect.  
In some places, Stephens' divisions are inaccurate and tend to break the sense of the subject. Because of such imperfections, a new system of supplementing the chapter-verse division with paragraph arrangements has been adopted in many of the newer revisions of the Bible. This often helps the reader to better comprehend the subject matter.

It must always be remembered that these division systems were not inspired by God. They have been devised by men to provide an aid for studying the Bible.

LETTER ANSWERING DEPARTMENT