Overview

Joseph Smith said that the Book of Mormon is the most correct book and the keystone of our religion. This chapter looks at what it means to say that it is the most correct book by comparing the Old Testament, the New Testament, and the Book of Mormon.

The Old Testament

Compiled largely by scribes after the Babylonian exile period
Parts may have been heavily edited after the Babylonian exile (Ezra); Deuteronomy may have been inserted
Missing books are mentioned (see “Lost Books,” LDS Bible Dictionary [BD], 725–26)
Apocryphal writings (see D&C 91)
Pseudepigrapha (e.g., the Book of Enoch, various apocalypses) are not included
The Dead Sea Scrolls, discovered in Qumran in 1947/48 (BD, 654–55), verify some of the manuscripts on which we base our Bible and show us other books we didn’t know about
Other missing books were revealed to the Prophet Joseph Smith:
• Book of Abraham, including the record of Enoch
• Book of Moses
• Quotations from the plates of brass (see below)

The New Testament

Gospels, Epistles, and revelation of Jesus Christ gathered by various branches of the church and individuals around the second century AD

Missing writings (BD, 725–26)

More pseudepigrapha (e.g., the Gospel of Thomas and Gospel of Peter) are not included

John’s writings revealed to the Prophet Joseph Smith (D&C 7; 77; 93:1–6)

The Bible as a whole

Final form not decided until the mid-fourth century

Old Testament: The Law and the Prophets were canonized early; the Writings were perhaps not stable until about the time of Christ. Nevertheless, even during the first century, there was no Jewish notion of a closed canon

New Testament: Not fixed until the fourth or fifth centuries

• Paul’s letters seem to have existed as a collection by the early second century, though they were not widely known among Christians
• The Gospels began to be collected at about the same time, and began to be treated as scripture as a group rather than individually

• No collection of non-Pauline epistles until the third century, and 1 Peter and 1 John were not included in any early collection

• Acts became part of collections in the second century; sometimes it was collected with the Gospels, sometimes with the non-Pauline epistles

• The book of Revelation was accepted in the second century, rejected in the third, and reaccepted in the fourth

• Some early canon lists: Muratorian canon (ca. AD 350) Eusebius’s (ca. AD 325)

• First list to name the twenty-seven books we currently accept: Athanasius’s (AD 327)

Transmission: prophets to various editors and compilers over a long period of time to us

**The Book of Mormon**

Written by commandment of God from the beginning, with portions (the gold plates) delivered by Moroni, the last custodian of the records, to Joseph Smith, who translated them under the guidance of God from the original “reformed Egyptian” text. The descriptions below are of the records referred to by
Book of Mormon writers, not all of which are themselves included in the Book of Mormon.

**Plates of Ether**

Jaredite history, begun at the Tower of Babel and continued to the end of their society

From twenty-four gold plates discovered by people of Limhi (Mosiah 21:25–27) and translated by King Mosiah

Abridged by Mormon and translated by Joseph Smith as the book of Ether

**Plates of brass** (*1 Nephi 5:10–14; Alma 37:3–4*)

Acquired from Laban by Lehi’s family when they left Jerusalem

Is this a Jewish record? An Israelite record? A Josephite record?

Genealogy of Joseph’s posterity from the beginning

**Five books of Moses** (*perhaps differing from our own*)

Record of Jews from the beginning to the reign of King Zedekiah

Prophecies of some of the holy prophets of same period to the time of Jeremiah (e.g., Zenos and Zenoch, not known in the Old Testament record). The bulk of their writing centers in incidents from the life of the patriarch Joseph, who was sold into Egypt

**Small plates of Nephi** (*included in their original form in the gold plates*)
Firsthand narrative account of Nephi and Jacob, primarily from the time of leaving Jerusalem until the time of King Benjamin

Primarily a sacred record (1 Nephi 19:3, 5–6)

Contained in current Book of Mormon as 1 Nephi through Words of Mormon

Differs from rest of the Book of Mormon in that it is also a firsthand narrative

**Large plates of Nephi**

Primarily narrative records of Nephite history (begun with emphasis on secular aspects, pre–King Benjamin) from the first Nephi to end of the Nephite civilization (1 Nephi 19:1–2, 4)

Translation of a portion (from Nephi to Benjamin) was contained in 116 pages of manuscript lost by Martin Harris

An abridgment of the rest is currently in the Book of Mormon: Mosiah through Moroni, excluding Ether

Sealed portion of the gold plates

Transmission: prophets to editors to prophet to us

**Questions**

How are these books of scripture the same? How are they different? For example, what difference does the mode of transmission make to each book?

Grant Hardy has written an important piece on how the Book of Mormon is different: “How the Book of Mor-
mon Is Not Like the Bible (and Why We Should Celebrate That!)” http://www.ldsmag.com/component/zine/article/5866?ac=1.