



Type: Journal Article

---

## Timing the Translation of the Book of Mormon: “Days [and Hours] Never to Be Forgotten”

Author(s): John W. Welch

Source: *BYU Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 57, No. 4 (2018), pp. 10–50

Published by: BYU Studies

---

**Abstract:** We know many details about the timing of the translation of the Book of Mormon. We have firm evidence that Oliver Cowdery began working as Joseph Smith’s scribe on April 7, 1829, and that Joseph began dictating to Oliver at about Mosiah chapter 2. First in Harmony, Pennsylvania, and then at the home of Peter Whitmer in Fayette, New York, the translation progressed quickly and was finished by June 30, 1829. By pinpointing anchor dates along the way (May 15, the visit from John the Baptist; May 31, the title page was translated; June 11, the copyright was secured) we can estimate where Joseph was in the translation and how the unfolding text of the Book of Mormon led Joseph to seek more knowledge and receive further revelation. Understanding the pace of and events surrounding the translation of the Book of Mormon increases our appreciation for this inspired text.



---

BYU Studies is collaborating with Book of Mormon Central to preserve and extend access to BYU Studies and to scholarly research on The Book of Mormon. Archived by permission of BYU Studies.

<http://byustudies.byu.edu/>

Northern District of New-York, } Do wit:

Be it remembered, That on the eleventh day of June — in the fifty third year of the Independence of the United States of America, A. D. 1829 Joseph Smith Junior

of the said District, has deposited in this Office the title of a Book the right whereof he claims as Author in the words following, to wit: The

Book of Mormon, an account written by the hand of Mormon upon plates taken from the plates of Nephi; Wherein it is an abridgment of the records of the people of Nephi and also of the Lamanites, which are a remnant of the house of Israel, and also to the Jew & Gentile written by way of commandment and also by the spirit of Prophecy & of revelation, written & shewed & hid not unto the Lord, that they might not be destroyed, to come forth by the gift & favor of God unto the interpretation thereof — sealed up by the hand of Mormon & hid up unto the Lord, to come forth in due time by the way of Gentile, the interpretation thereof by the gift of God; a abridgment taken from the book of Ether: Also, which is a record of the people of Shinarump, which were written at the time the Lord commanded the language of the people, when they were building a tower to get to heaven; which is to show unto the remnant of the house of Israel how great things the Lord hath done for their fathers; & that they may know the covenant of the Father that they are not cast off forever; and also to the coming of the Jew & Gentile that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, manifesting himself unto all nations. And as if there be fault, it be the mistake of man; otherwise we cannot put the things of God, that we may see from a spot, at the judgment seat of Christ. By Joseph Smith Junior, author & proprietor

In conformity to the act of the Congress of the United States, entitled "An act for the encouragement of learning, by securing the copies of Maps, Charts, and Books, to the authors and proprietors of such copies, during the times therein mentioned;" and also, to the act entitled "An act supplementary to an act entitled 'An act for the encouragement of learning, by securing the copies of Maps, Charts, and Books, to the authors and proprietors of such copies during the times therein mentioned;' and extending the benefits thereof to the arts of Designing, Engraving, and Etching historical and other prints."

A. R. Lansing, Clerk of the Dist. Court of the United States for the Northern District of New York

FIGURE 1. Copyright application for the Book of Mormon, filed June 11, 1829. Courtesy Rare Book and Special Collections, Library of Congress.

# Timing the Translation of the Book of Mormon

## “Days [and Hours] Never to Be Forgotten”

*John W. Welch*

This paper aims to stimulate specific thinking about the intense and complex events during which the Book of Mormon was translated in 1829. Encouraged initially by Elder Neal A. Maxwell,<sup>1</sup> and building on my chapter in the second edition of *Opening the Heavens*,<sup>2</sup> this article strives to be as precise as possible about the timing of the events and progress of the Book of Mormon translation during the months and days it took place. In 1834, Oliver Cowdery wrote, “These were days never to be forgotten—to sit under the sound of a voice dictated by the *inspiration*

---

1. A wise question that Elder Maxwell asked me in 1985 about how long it took Joseph to translate the Book of Mormon launched my thirty-year involvement with this subject. It began with “The Translation of the Book of Mormon: Basic Historical Information,” FARMS Paper (1986), which was utilized in an entry I wrote with Tim Rathbone, “Book of Mormon Translation by Joseph Smith,” in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 1:210–13; and also John W. Welch, “How Long Did It Take to Translate the Book of Mormon?” in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon: A Decade of New Research*, ed. John W. Welch (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, Utah: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1992), 1–8.

2. John W. Welch, “The Miraculous Timing of the Translation of the Book of Mormon,” in *Opening the Heavens: Accounts of Divine Manifestations, 1820–1844*, ed. John W. Welch, 2d ed. (Provo, Utah: BYU Studies, 2017), 78–227; also included in the volume is a day-by-day chronology (85–120), the chart “Estimated Day-by-Day Translation in 1829” (121–25), and 206 historical source documents regarding the timing of the translation, arranged in nine categories (126–227). I thank Sandra Thorne and Jennifer Hurlbut for their editorial and sourcing assistance in bringing this new edition to fruition.

of heaven, awakened the utmost gratitude.”<sup>3</sup> Looking closely at the documents and the dating of all that happened during the three months of April, May, and June 1829 can likewise awaken a greater sense of gratitude and respect for this extraordinary volume of scripture.

After reviewing the previous scholarship on the timing of the translation, five dates will be examined that anchor the chronology of the three months principally involved. Questions such as “How long did it take to translate the Book of Mormon?” and “How much variation has there been in the estimates?” will then be addressed. While most estimates have been imprecise or cautiously conservative, all fall basically within much the same tight time range. Attention then will shift to a new and further question: “How many other time-consuming things were going on in Joseph Smith’s life during the three months of the translation?” Taking all that information into account, this study will then develop and propose allowable rates of speed for the translation in terms of “words per minute” and “hours per day.” All of this more detailed information will open up insights into the historical understanding and experiential comprehension of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon.

### Previous Scholarship

A century ago, people such as B. H. Roberts worked on this subject with limited available information. In 1909, Roberts generally concluded that the dictation of the existing English text of the Book of Mormon began on April 7, 1829, and was completed somewhere between the early part of June and sometime in August, taking from as few as 60 to as many as 120 days.<sup>4</sup>

In a carefully written article in 1941, the meticulous Francis W. Kirkham concluded that the translation took “about seventy-five working days.”<sup>5</sup>

---

3. O. Cowdery to W. W. Phelps, September 7, 1834 [Letter 1], printed in *Messenger and Advocate* 1 (October 1834): 14; document 70 in Welch, *Opening the Heavens*, 157, emphasis in original.

4. B. H. Roberts, *New Witnesses for God*, 3 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1909), 2:95, 122–23; see generally B. H. Roberts, “Translation of the Book of Mormon,” *Improvement Era* 9 (April 1906): 425–36, 706. I thank Neal Rappleye for his assistance in researching and updating this review of the previous scholarship on this subject.

5. Francis W. Kirkham, “The Writing of the Book of Mormon: Concerning the Time, the Place, the Scribes, and the Printing,” *Improvement Era* 44 (June 1941): 341–43, 370–75. According to Kirkham, there was no translation between



He and almost everyone else at that time thought that Joseph commenced in April with 1 Nephi 1 (rather than picking up in Mosiah at the point where the lost manuscript pages had left off, discussed below). Kirkham wondered how long into July the translation may have continued.

Kirkham's suggestion that the Book of Mormon was translated within seventy-five working days amazed people, and Fawn M. Brodie countered Kirkham's estimate of this "phenomenal[ly]" short time simply by asserting that Martin Harris had been taking dictation from Joseph for some time before April 7.<sup>6</sup> But little substantive evidence has turned up that either Harris or Emma Smith took much, if any, dictation in 1828 after the lost manuscript pages were completed in June 1828, or that Martin wrote as a scribe for Joseph during Martin's short visit to Harmony, Pennsylvania, in March 1829.<sup>7</sup> At that time Martin was embroiled in a lawsuit brought against him by his wife, Lucy Harris, seeking to prohibit him from having any further dealings with Joseph Smith.

After a few publications around 1990 on the translation,<sup>8</sup> interest about Joseph Smith flourished at the time of the 2005 bicentennial of his birth.

---

the time the manuscript pages were lost and Doctrine and Covenants 10 was received, which he places in November or December 1828 (342–43). Oliver arrived and began writing April 7, 1829. There is no indication from Joseph Smith that he translated anything besides the lost manuscript pages before April 7. Both Joseph and Oliver indicate that they started at or near the beginning and continued to the end. A small portion was written by Emma before the arrival of Oliver. 1 Nephi 7 is in Oliver's handwriting, so no more than 16 pages could have been written before his arrival (Kirkham is clearly assuming a translation order that starts with 1 Nephi). Translation was completed sometime near the close of June 1829. Ether 5 is assumed to be the passage that inspired the Three Witnesses (373). The translation was complete by July 1, 1829, or shortly afterward (370–73). Thus the book of six hundred pages was prepared in seventy-five working days.

6. Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith, the Mormon Prophet*, 2d rev. ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1986), 61. Brodie dates the translation from April 7, 1829, to the first week of July (61–62). She writes, "Mormons have maintained that the volume was written in seventy-five working days. This would mean an average of 3,700 words a day" (62). For her argument that Martin had been taking dictation from Joseph for some time before April 7, see 57–60, 62.

7. The amount that could have been translated between June 1828 and April 1829 is discussed further on pages 19–22 herein.

8. John W. Welch, "I Have a Question: How Long Did It Take Joseph Smith to Translate the Book of Mormon?" *Ensign* 18 (January 1988), 46–47, stating that the Book of Mormon was translated in "about sixty-five working days,"

From 2002 to 2005, the translation of the Book of Mormon was mentioned, mostly in passing, in eight publications, by authors including Robert Remini, Terryl Givens, Milt Backman, Dan Vogel, Richard Bushman,<sup>9</sup> and

---

that nearly the entire Book of Mormon “was translated between 7 April and 30 June 1829,” with a few pages being translated in March 1829 with Emma as scribe, and that the translation with Oliver likely began “at the beginning of the book of Mosiah, where Joseph had last left off,” making it “probable that he did not work on 1 and 2 Nephi until later—in June.” (On Joseph and Oliver beginning at Mosiah, see Welch, “Miraculous Timing,” 103 nn. 69–71.) This short article states the following: The books of Mosiah, Alma, Helaman, and 3 Nephi up to chapter 11 were translated by May 15, 1829, since that chapter is likely what “led Joseph and Oliver to inquire of the Lord about the authority to baptize.” Fourth Nephi, Mormon, Ether, Moroni, and the title page were all translated by the end of May. Copyright was secured using the title page on June 11, 1829. The translation reached 2 Nephi 27:12 by June 20, 1829, thus prompting the Book of Mormon witnesses. The process spanned about eighty-five days from April 7 to around June 28, though not all of those days were spent translating. It would have taken about a week to translate 1 Nephi and a day and a half for King Benjamin’s speech.

Welch, “How Long Did It Take to Translate the Book of Mormon?” 1–8, is a short report that has the same basic information as the *Ensign* article, with some minor differences. Witnesses are said to have seen the plates “about the middle of June” (2) or “in late June” (3), and the translation occurred in “a span of no more than sixty-five to seventy-five total days” for an average of seven to eight pages a day (3–4). Assuming a “Mosiah First” translation, there would have been 212 pages to translate between May 15 (3 Nephi 11) and the witnesses seeing the plates (2 Nephi 27) in mid to late June, making an average of about ten pages a day for that stretch.

Welch and Rathbone, “Book of Mormon Translation by Joseph Smith,” 1:210–13, has one minor difference from the two previous articles in stating that the translation was completed “the last week of June, less than sixty working days” (210).

9. Robert V. Remini, *Joseph Smith* (New York: Viking Book, 2002), 61–65; Terryl L. Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon: The American Scripture That Launched a New World Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 31–37; Milton V. Backman, “Book of Mormon, Translation of,” in *Book of Mormon Reference Companion*, ed. Dennis L. Largey (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2003), 157–60; Dan Vogel, *Joseph Smith: The Making of a Prophet* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2004), 166; Richard Lyman Bushman, “Joseph Smith as Translator,” in *Believing History: Latter-day Saint Essays*, ed. Reid L. Neilson and Jed Woodworth (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 236, which states: “translating day after day for three months in 1829 . . . gave Joseph pleasure”; Richard Lyman Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New

others,<sup>10</sup> but little new information regarding the basic chronology was added. Also in 2005, the year of the Joseph Smith bicentennial, the first edition of *Opening the Heavens* was published by BYU Studies. It contained a lengthy historical chronology of the events in 1828–29.<sup>11</sup>

In the next decade, bits of new information were suggested. Such statements were common: “The pace of translation was stunning: about eight pages a day—remarkable even for skilled translators,” as Richard Turley put it.<sup>12</sup> In 2015, Michael MacKay and Gerrit Dirkmaat conservatively concluded that “nearly all of the Book of Mormon” was translated

---

York: Alfred Knopf, 2005), 70, 71, 74, calls the translation beginning in April 1829 “rapid-fire” and notes that Oliver witnessed Joseph’s purchase of the Isaac Hale property, that translation began the next day, and that the translation was completed by late June 1829. See also Richard Lyman Bushman, “The Recovery of the Book of Mormon,” in *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited*, ed. Noel B. Reynolds (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, Utah: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1997), 21–38.

10. LaMar Petersen, *The Creation of the Book of Mormon: A Historical Inquiry* (Salt Lake City: Freethinker Press, 1998), 95; Grant H. Palmer, *An Insider’s View of Mormon Origins* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2002), 66 (Joseph Smith “dictated the final manuscript in about ninety days,” but Palmer also asserts that Joseph had nine months to ponder over it before Cowdery arrived in April 1829, and eight months to refine it before publication in March 1830); David Persuitte, *Joseph Smith and the Origins of the Book of Mormon*, 2d ed. (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2000), 83 (which acknowledges that virtually all of the Book of Mormon was written from April to July 1829, nine pages per day, but claims that Joseph had been translating with Emma since September 1828); Matthew B. Brown, *Plates of Gold: The Book of Mormon Comes Forth* (American Fork, Utah: Covenant Communications, 2003), 82, 96; Earl M. Wunderli, *An Imperfect Book: What the Book of Mormon Tells Us about Itself* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2013), 25–26 (translation stopped until Cowdery arrived on April 5, completed by the end of June, about sixty-three days, for an average of eight typeset pages per day).

11. The second edition of this book (2017) brings many details up to date and, most of all, provides links added by Sandra Thorne to the places on the josephsmithpapers.org website, where many of the primary source documents can be viewed and accessed.

12. Richard E. Turley Jr. and William W. Slaughter, *How We Got the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2011), 19–20. These authors tell that translation with Oliver as scribe began in earnest on April 7, 1829. “The pace of translation was stunning: about eight pages a day—remarkable even for skilled translators.” Joseph and Oliver began with Mosiah. “By the end of June, the translation was complete.”

“in less than ninety days.”<sup>13</sup> But how much less than ninety days still remains a question. While there have been differences of opinion, a consensus has emerged on many of the most important points regarding the translation timing. And even a ninety-day maximum estimate is a phenomenally short time range.

Most recently, the second edition of *Opening the Heavens* (2017) contains 150 pages of original source documents and analysis concerning the miraculous translation of the Book of Mormon, including a new five-page chart (reproduced on pages 45–49), projecting, day by day, the likely progress that Joseph and Oliver would have needed to make in their translation, from April 7 to the end of June 1829, in order to stay within the allowable elapsed time frame. Although this interesting and useful study will always be, to some extent, a work in progress, the information now available and the data now developed instills greater confidence about many of these data points than was possible a decade ago. As Richard Bushman said in endorsing *Opening the Heavens*, laying open “all the crucial documents . . . for inspection, with enough commentary to put them in context” provides great benefits to Book of Mormon readers: “nothing could be more helpful—and inspiring.”<sup>14</sup>

### Five Anchor Dates

On the five-page chart,<sup>15</sup> five dates are in bold. These can be called anchor dates. Whatever one thinks about the timing and sequence of the translation of the Book of Mormon depends largely on what one thinks about the degree of certainty about these anchor dates and the status of the translation project on each of those particular dates. History is admittedly an inexact science, dependent to a large extent on the accidental survival of information and personal memory. In stabilizing historical judgments, one always looks for certain anchor points that

---

13. Michael Hubbard MacKay and Gerrit J. Dirkmaat, *From Darkness unto Light: Joseph Smith's Translation and Publication of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, Utah Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2015), 114, 119–20, states that Oliver began taking dictation on April 7, 1829; the pace of translation was faster than it had ever been before; and Joseph translated “nearly all of the Book of Mormon in less than ninety days.”

14. As quoted on the back cover of *Opening the Heavens*.

15. The chart on pages 45–49 was included in the printed program for my lecture (the Willes Lecture on November 8, 2017) and is reformatted from the chart found in *Opening the Heavens*, 2d ed., 121–25. I thank Marny Parkin for designing that chart for these various uses.



hold in place the structural girders of historical understanding. While remaining open to any new information relevant to the timing of the translation of the Book of Mormon, I propose that these five anchor dates can be established. Based on credible documents and corroborating details, the overall chronology points reasonably to the conclusion that, with the probable exception of a few pages written before Oliver Cowdery's arrival on April 5, the vast majority of the English text of the Book of Mormon came forth, day after day, and hour by hour, beginning April 7 and ending the weekend of June 30, 1829. Such detail regarding the foundational events of any new religious movement is, as far as I know, unequalled.

**Anchor Date 1: April 7, 1829.** Oliver Cowdery commenced work as a scribe for Joseph Smith on April 7, 1829, in Harmony, Pennsylvania. Support for this dating has long been found in the September 7, 1834, letter of Oliver Cowdery printed in the *Messenger and Advocate*, the official Church newspaper that year.<sup>16</sup> In this letter, Cowdery says that he arrived in Harmony for the first time in the early evening of Sunday, April 5, and began working as scribe for Joseph on April 7.

Tuesday, April 7, 1829, was the first day on which Oliver Cowdery sat down in the morning, picked up his quill pen, dipped it in his inkwell, and began to write, line after line, the words that he heard coming forth from the voice of the twenty-three-year-old prophet, Joseph Smith. Oliver had arrived in the remote village of Harmony on Sunday evening, April 5. He had walked more than one hundred miles to get there because, as Joseph Smith himself wrote in 1832, “The Lord appeared unto a young man by the name of Oliver Cowdery and shewed unto him the plates in a vision and also the truth of the work and what the Lord was about to do through me his unworthy servant. Therefore he was desirous to come and write for me to translate.”<sup>17</sup>

Corroborating evidence of Oliver's vision may possibly be found in Doctrine and Covenants 6, a revelation given to Oliver shortly after his arrival on April 5, perhaps at the end of the day on April 7 or shortly after Oliver had commenced writing for Joseph as he translated. These words of divine encouragement were given to Oliver “as a witness . . . that the words or the work which thou hast been writing are true” (D&C 6:17).

---

16. Cowdery to Phelps, 14.

17. “Letterbook 1,” [6], Joseph Smith Papers, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/letterbook-1/12>; document 13 in Welch, “Miraculous Timing,” 132.

The revelation blessed Oliver for having “inquired” of God and states that because of his inquiry, he had received direction from God to “come to the place” where he then was, namely Harmony: “Blessed art thou for what thou hast done; for thou hast inquired of me, and . . . thou hast received instruction of my Spirit. If it had not been so, thou wouldst not have come to the place [Harmony, Pennsylvania,] where thou art at this time” (6:14). The revelation continued, inviting Oliver to ask again, as he had inquired before: “Behold, I am Jesus Christ, the Son of God. . . . If you desire a further witness, cast your mind upon the night that you cried unto me in your heart, that you might know concerning the truth of these things. Did I not speak peace to your mind concerning the matter?” (6:21–23).

For reasons that surely pleased and maybe also surprised Oliver, Joseph took Oliver immediately into his full confidence. Perhaps by comparing the details they had each seen independently in their visionary and revelatory experiences, both of them were completely confident that the other was telling the truth. With that assurance, Joseph allowed Oliver to work as his dedicated scribe, seated only a few feet away at the same small table, as Joseph translated. And Oliver obeyed the Lord’s instruction to “stand by my servant Joseph” (6:18).

But how sure can one be that Oliver remembered the date, April 7, correctly? Five years later, in 1834, Oliver wrote to William W. Phelps, “Near the time of the setting of the Sun, Sabbath evening, April 5th, 1829, my natural eyes, for the first time beheld this brother [Joseph].” Perhaps Oliver is suggesting here that he had seen Joseph before with his spiritual eyes, distinct from his “natural eyes.” Continuing, Oliver says, “On Monday, the 6th, I assisted him in arranging some business of a temporal nature, and on Tuesday the 7th, commenced to write the book of Mormon. These were days never to be forgotten.”<sup>18</sup> As memorable as all of those days in Harmony were, Oliver seems to have remembered these first three days most particularly. Like a first day at college or the first time meeting a future spouse, that first day, April 7, must have impressed Oliver deeply, exceeding all of his expectations, as he sat for his first time under the sound of Joseph’s voice as he dictated the Book of Mormon in a most inspirational manner.

Not long ago, Gordon Madsen found in the local Pennsylvania courthouse corroborating evidence regarding Oliver’s presence in Harmony on April 6, 1829. At the courthouse, Madsen found the legal papers for

---

18. Cowdery to Phelps, 14.

the 1831 sale by Joseph of his property in Harmony to George Noble, a local businessman. These legal documents, securing Noble's chain of title, included the original 1829 agreement between Joseph Smith and Emma's father, Isaac Hale, proving beyond any doubt that on that day Joseph became the legal owner of the cabin and property where the young couple had been living. Two legally required signatures officially witnessed that April 6 agreement: one was Oliver's and the other was Samuel Smith's.<sup>19</sup> So now we know that Oliver was indeed in Harmony on April 6, and we know what the "temporal" business was that was conducted that day. Samuel (Joseph's twenty-year-old younger brother) may have come with Oliver from Manchester, New York. In March, Samuel had been with Joseph Smith Sr. in Harmony, helping Joseph Jr. with work on his farm. He may well have accompanied Joseph Sr. back to Manchester and then turned around to help Oliver find his way to Harmony, or he may have stayed in Harmony. In either event, farm work would probably have consumed a good part of the rest of the day on April 6.

A ledger on the back of the April 6 agreement shows that Joseph paid Isaac sixty-four dollars that day and promised to pay the balance in the future, which he did. This legal transaction gave Joseph Smith ownership and the legal right to say who could or could not come onto his property and into his small wooden home there. With that, he had a degree of essential security to protect against Isaac Hale or others who might disturb the translation process. And with that, the very next day—April 7—Joseph and Oliver commenced work. Thus anchor date 1 is substantially secure.

Before that date, and without property rights and protective security, little translation took place in the first three months of 1829. Of course, a year before, the book of Lehi had been translated, with Martin Harris as the main scribe. Emma and Reuben Hale apparently acted as scribes in those three months as well.<sup>20</sup> When Emma said in 1856 that she wrote "a part of" the manuscript of the Book of Mormon, she was referring to a time when Joseph said to Emma that he was surprised to read that

---

19. "Agreement with Isaac Hale, 6 April 1829," Joseph Smith Papers, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/agreement-with-isaac-hale-6-april-1829/1>.

20. Joseph Knight, Reminiscences, 2–6, MS 3470, Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, [https://dcms.lds.org/delivery/DeliveryManagerServlet?dps\\_pid=IE1276586](https://dcms.lds.org/delivery/DeliveryManagerServlet?dps_pid=IE1276586).

Jerusalem had walls.<sup>21</sup> But that text about Jerusalem could have been either at the beginning of the lost book of Lehi, translated in April 1828, or at the beginning of 1 Nephi, translated in June 1829, and was likely not translated between September 1828 and April 7, 1829.

At least six documents say that a little was translated in 1829 prior to April 7. Without going into all of these sometimes conflicting historical sources in detail,<sup>22</sup> here are the main documents relevant to this point:

1. In 1832, speaking of the time before Oliver Cowdery received his vision and then came to Harmony “to write for me,” Joseph Smith personally recorded, “Now my wife had written some for me to translate and also my Brother Samuel H Smith.” How many pages they wrote is unknown, but apparently it was not very many—only “some”—and still not enough to “accomplish the work” as “commanded.”<sup>23</sup>
2. Emma said in 1879 that Joseph Smith “would dictate to me hour after hour; and when returning after meals, or after interruptions, he could at once begin where he had left off.”<sup>24</sup> Unfortunately, as she describes his “usual” dictation practices she does not say when it was that he so dictated to her, or perhaps to others, or how many pages of text were created before or after the manuscript pages were lost.
3. Oliver said of the Book of Mormon to William Frampton (as recorded in 1901), “I wrote it (with the exception of a few pages)

---

21. Emma Smith, quoted in Edmund C. Briggs, “A Visit to Nauvoo in 1856,” *Journal of History* 9 (October 1916): 454.

22. In addition to those six, a statement by Joseph Smith III mentions that Emma did some writing but adds no specific information. Joseph Smith III to Mrs. E. Orton, March 7, 1900, Community of Christ Library-Archives, Independence, Missouri, cited in Dan Vogel, comp. and ed., *Early Mormon Documents*, 4 vols. (Salt Lake City: Signature Book, 1996–2002), 1:544, cited as document 43, Welch, “Miraculous Timing,” 145. And David Whitmer once said to Andrew Jenson as they examined manuscripts of the Book of Mormon, that “excepting comparatively a few pages,” they were all “in the handwriting of Oliver Cowdery.” Andrew Jenson, ed., “The Three Witnesses,” *Historical Record* 6 (May 1887): 216–17, cited as document 80 in Welch, “Miraculous Timing,” 163.

23. “Letterbook 1,” [6].

24. Joseph Smith III, “Last Testimony of Sister Emma,” *Saints’ Herald* 26 (October 1, 1879): 289–90; Joseph Smith III, “Last Testimony of Sister Emma,” *Saints’ Advocate* 2 (October 1879): 50–52, cited as document 41 in Welch, “Miraculous Timing,” 143–44.

with this right hand (extending his hand) as the inspired words fell from the lips of Joseph Smith.”<sup>25</sup> Apparently, those “few pages” would have included whatever pages were written by any other scribes at the Whitmer home in Fayette, New York, after Joseph’s arrival there about June 4, 1829, and also whatever pages were translated before April 7.

4. David Whitmer once said in 1878 that a “few pages” were written by Emma, John Whitmer, and Christian Whitmer.<sup>26</sup> John and Christian would have written in June 1829, but it is uncertain what time David has in mind when he says that Emma wrote a few pages. He may be talking about translation during June 1829, but perhaps David had become aware that Emma and Samuel had written “some” for Joseph prior to April 7, well before David came to Harmony.
5. Lucy Smith recalled in her 1844–1845 memoir, “Emma had so much of her time taken up with her [house] work that she could write *but little* for him.”<sup>27</sup> But Lucy gives no hint about what that “little” amount consisted of or when she thought Emma had done this writing. She may have been referring to pages that were written in the spring of 1828 and thus were among the lost manuscript pages or perhaps to pages written in the early months of 1829. Lucy was present in Harmony for a winter visit in February 1829, and so she did not see much of Joseph’s activity during the months from the end of September 1828 to the beginning of April 1829 personally. But she was in contact with Joseph and was aware enough of his great need for scribal help, which is why she and others in the Smith family, when they met Oliver Cowdery and found him to

---

25. William M. Frampton to John E. Booth, September 15, 1901, microfilm of typescript, MS 5641, Church History Library, cited as document 76 in Welch, “Miraculous Timing,” 161, emphasis added.

26. Jenson, “Three Witnesses,” 216–17. See also David Whitmer, interview by P. Wilhelm Poulson, *Deseret Evening News*, August 16, 1878, cited as document 81 in Welch, “Miraculous Timing,” 163; and *Chicago Times*, October 17, 1881, cited in Lyndon W. Cook, ed., *David Whitmer Interviews: A Restoration Witness* (Orem, Utah: Grandin Book, 1991), 10, cited as document 88 in Welch, “Miraculous Timing,” 168.

27. Lucy Mack Smith, “History, 1844–1845,” book 8, p. 3, Joseph Smith Papers, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1844-1845/95>, emphasis added, cited as document 108 in Welch, “Miraculous Timing,” 182.



be trustworthy, told Oliver of the plates and of Joseph's great need for help.<sup>28</sup>

6. In March 1829, in a revelation, now found in Doctrine and Covenants 5, given to Martin Harris,<sup>29</sup> Joseph was told to translate "a few more pages" and then to "stop for a season" (D&C 5:30). How much translation Joseph did before stopping is unknown.

So how many pages of the original manuscript of the current Book of Mormon might have been written before Oliver Cowdery arrived on April 5? Of course, we do not know for sure. But the consistent use of the words "some," "few," and "little" leave the impression that not very many pages—perhaps as few as three or four—were written during those stressful, cold, dark, and needy months, when supplies were limited, visitors were frequent, and timber was being cut, although other farm chores may have been fewer than in the springtime. Although our information is limited, the foregoing six statements are evidence that only a few pages of dictation were written between the summer of 1828 and April 1829.

How many words would usually have been written on a page of common foolscap manuscript paper? Royal Skousen estimates that there were 608 pages of manuscript in the dictation copy of the Book of Mormon and that the earliest text contained a total of 269,510 words,<sup>30</sup> thus there were on average 443.27 words per page. At this rate, the 965 words in Mosiah 1 would have taken about 2.2 pages, and Mosiah 2 (with 2,109 words) would have been written on about 4.8 pages. One percent of the total Book of Mormon would be 2,695 words, or approximately 6.1 pages.

We do not know, of course, exactly at what point in the dictation Oliver commenced to write on April 7. Was it early in Mosiah 2 or later in Mosiah 3 or Mosiah 4? For several reasons, there is a strong

---

28. Lucy Mack Smith, "History, 1844–1845," book 7, pp. 12–13.

29. Isaac Hale recollected in 1834 that he saw Joseph and Martin working together in March 1829 and read certain words that the pair had written and copied on two pages of paper that they were then comparing. Hales's recollection probably relates to the writing of Doctrine and Covenants 5, not part of the Book of Mormon. Isaac recalled seeing words such as "witness," "three," and the "orders" of God, which appear in Doctrine and Covenants 5:1, 11, and 15. "Mormonism," *Susquehanna Register* (Montrose, Penn.), May 1, 1834, 1; Susan Easton Black and Larry C. Porter, *Martin Harris: Uncompromising Witness of the Book of Mormon* (Provo, Utah: BYU Studies, 2018), 129.

30. Royal Skousen, *The Original Manuscript of the Book of Mormon* (Provo, Utah: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 2001), 35–36.

consensus that Joseph picked up where the lost manuscript pages had left off, which would have been in the time of King Benjamin's reign.<sup>31</sup> These reasons include (1) it was most likely the translation of 2 Nephi 27:12, 22, and not Ether 5:2–4, that triggered the experiences of the Three and Eight Witnesses at the end of June 1829; (2) if they had begun with 1 Nephi, there would have been very little left to translate at the Whitmer home, given that they were already well into 3 Nephi by May 15; (3) as discussed below, the title page of the Book of Mormon, at the end of the large plates of Mormon, was evidently translated before June 11, and not around the end of June; and (4) the handwriting of Oliver Cowdery is on the earliest extant lines of the original manuscript, already at 1 Nephi 2:2–3:16, with that of other scribes in the middle of 1 Nephi (which appears to be the writing of John and Christian Whitmer).<sup>32</sup> All this points to the likely conclusion that 1 Nephi through Omni “were probably translated last—that is, after the plates of Mormon and Moroni were translated.”<sup>33</sup> If only the dictation manuscript for the first part of the book of Mosiah had survived, one could answer this question with much greater surety. But no part of the book of Mosiah has survived in the original manuscript pages or fragments.<sup>34</sup> The earliest text from the original manuscript that is extant is Alma 10:31, which Oliver Cowdery scribed, and he certainly began writing long before that.

Not wanting to overestimate or underestimate the number of pages written by Emma or Samuel before Oliver Cowdery arrived, I have assumed that the point at which Joseph and Oliver began working was somewhere in Mosiah 2, about five or six pages into Mosiah. They may, of course, have begun at the end of Mosiah 1 or in Mosiah 3 or Mosiah 4 or later. By allowing a margin of error of plus or minus 2 percent, a tolerable allowance for statistical reporting, I assume that Oliver began scribing somewhere in King Benjamin's speech. If readers wish to move this commencement point to a place a few chapters later in the text

---

31. Welch, “Miraculous Timing,” 100–103.

32. Skousen, *Original Manuscript*, 62–67.

33. Skousen, *Original Manuscript*, 33. This topic will be explored further in forthcoming sections of volume 3 of Skousen's Book of Mormon Critical Text Project.

34. Jack Lyon and Kent Minson have argued that the changes made on the printer's manuscript (fig. 2) of Mosiah 1 may reflect the place where the lost manuscript pages left off. The first two chapters of Mosiah were lost. Jack M. Lyon and Kent R. Minson, “When Pages Collide: Dissecting the Words of Mormon,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 51, no. 4 (2012): 120–36.



of Mosiah and then make adjustments to the charts presented in this article, that would not necessarily change any overall conclusions significantly. At whatever point Joseph and Oliver began working on April 7, that starting date need not be further debated for present purposes. No data suggests or implies that anchor date 1 is insecure as the day on which they commenced.

**Anchor Date 2: May 15.** Joseph and Oliver reached the middle of 3 Nephi before May 15, 1829. Joseph Smith's own record tells us that John the Baptist ordained him and Oliver to the Aaronic Priesthood and they baptized each other on May 15, 1829.<sup>35</sup> Oliver Cowdery adds that John's appearance happened in the context of Joseph and Oliver having just translated and written the middle of 3 Nephi. Lucy Mack Smith confirms that Joseph and Oliver "were deeply engaged in the work of writing and translation, and progressed rapidly."<sup>36</sup>

In 1834, Oliver said, "After writing the account given of the Savior's ministry to the remnant of the seed of Jacob upon this continent," Joseph and he saw that "none had authority from God to administer the ordinance of the gospel."<sup>37</sup> This led to the appearance of John the Baptist.<sup>38</sup> Lucy's narrative adds: "One morning however they sat down to their usual work when the first thing that presented itself to Joseph was a commandment from God that he and Oliver should repair to the water each of them to be baptized."<sup>39</sup>

These accounts may indicate that they were not translating 3 Nephi 11 and 12 on May 15 but had translated those chapters a day or two earlier. That would allow time for Joseph to wonder overnight about the need to be baptized. In those two chapters in 3 Nephi, they would have

---

35. "History, circa 1841, Draft [Draft 3]," 35, Joseph Smith Papers, <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-circa-1841-draft-draft-3/35>; "History, 1838–1856, Volume A-1 [23 December 1805–30 August 1834]," 17–18, Joseph Smith Papers, <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-a-1-23-december-1805-30-august-1834/23>.

36. Lucy Mack Smith, "History, 1844–1845," book 8, p. 4. In agreement is *Saints: The Story of The Church of Jesus Christ in the Latter Days*, vol. 1, *The Standard of Truth, 1815–1846* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2018), 66.

37. Oliver Cowdery, "Dear Brother," *Messenger and Advocate* 1 (October 1834): 15.

38. "This [being baptized by authority] was not long desired before it was realized." Cowdery to Phelps, 15.

39. Lucy Mack Smith, "History, 1844–1845," book 8, p. 4.



encountered nineteen occurrences of the word “baptize,” and they would have learned about Jesus giving the authority to baptize to twelve disciples. Then, as they reflected on their need to be baptized in the Lord’s way before commencing work on the morning of May 15, they were commanded by the Lord to be baptized. At that point, John the Baptist appeared and gave them instructions and authority. According to Joseph’s history, Samuel was baptized ten days later, May 25.<sup>40</sup>

On the chart (page 46), I estimate that the text in 3 Nephi 13–15 was translated on May 14 and that 3 Nephi 16–18 was finished during the afternoon or evening of May 15. In translating the sentences at the end of 3 Nephi 18, when the resurrected Lord ascended back into heaven for that night, Joseph and Oliver would have encountered the related passage in which Jesus bestowed upon the twelve New World disciples “power to give the gift of the Holy Ghost” (3 Nephi 18:37). That awareness of the need to have a higher power in addition to the authority to baptize could well have heightened their desire to be ordained to that higher priesthood, which John had said would be “conferred on [them] hereafter” (JS–H 1:70). The ordination to the higher priesthood by Peter, James, and John may have occurred about May 19 since Joseph and Oliver were returning from a trip to Colesville for supplies about that time, but that remains uncertain although compatible with this overall chronology.<sup>41</sup>

Counting from anchor date 2, Joseph and Oliver were right on schedule to finish the large plates by the end of May, assuming that they continued at a steady pace of translation throughout April and May, both before and after May 15.

**Anchor Date 3: May 31.** This date is derived from several circumstantial evidences that lead to the likely conclusion that the title page of the Book of Mormon was translated on or shortly before May 31, 1829:

1. Joseph said that the body of the title page was on “the very last leaf, on the left hand side of the collection or book of [the large] plates.”<sup>42</sup>

---

40. “History, 1838–1856, Volume A-1,” 19.

41. See discussion in Brian Q. Cannon and BYU Studies staff, “The Earliest Accounts of the Restoration of the Priesthood,” in Welch, *Opening the Heavens*, 233–45.

42. “History, circa June 1839–circa 1841 [Draft 2],” 34, Joseph Smith Papers, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-circa-june-1839-circa-1841-draft-2/40>.



2. The copyright application for the Book of Mormon contained the full and exact text of the title page of the Book of Mormon, and it was filed on June 11, 1829 (see the discussion of anchor date 4 below). Thus the title page (and therefore also the books of Ether and Moroni, the last books on the plates of Mormon) must have been translated before June 11.
3. If the title page was translated before June 11, and if the title page was “the very last leaf” of the large plates, what remained to be translated at the Whitmer home in June was, at a minimum, the small plates.
4. Joseph and Emma moved from Harmony, Pennsylvania, to Fayette, New York, the first week in June, considerably reducing the number of days (from ten to about six) available for translation work between May 31 and June 11.<sup>43</sup>
5. While it is possible that the large plates were finished and the title page was translated between June 5 and 10, any such time would reduce inordinately the number of days available for the translation of the small plates, which were finished by June 28 (as shown in the discussion of anchor date 5 below).
6. All of this is consistent with the strong consensus (explained above in the discussion of anchor date 1) that when Oliver arrived, the translation work resumed where the lost pages had left off, with the book of Mosiah in the large plates.
7. Thus, when the translation resumed in Fayette, it most likely began with 1 Nephi.
8. The writing of three different scribes appears on the extant original manuscript pages of 1 Nephi. One of the scribes was Oliver Cowdery, and the other two scribes were most likely John and Christian Whitmer, who were in Fayette.<sup>44</sup>
9. In addition, the title page was published on June 26 in a public notice in the *Wayne Sentinel*, a Palmyra newspaper. That was probably a couple of days before the translation of the small plates was completed at the end of June, which is consistent with Joseph

---

43. See documents cited in Welch, “Miraculous Timing,” 108.

44. Skousen, *Original Manuscript*, 62–67; “History, circa June 1839–circa 1841 [Draft 2],” 22; David Whitmer, interview by Poulson; David Whitmer, interview by Thomas Wood Smith, *Fall River Herald*, March 28, 1879, in Cook, *David Whitmer Interviews*, cited as document 82 in Welch, “Miraculous Timing,” 163.

Smith's statement that the title page did not come at the end of the small plates of Nephi but at the end of the plates of Mormon.<sup>45</sup>

10. Dating the translation of the title page at May 31 allows for enough days before and after that date to allow for the translation to be accomplished at a steady, uniform pace. Although one cannot be absolutely certain, any assumption that large sections of the Book of Mormon were translated in a concentrated few days, at irregularly rapid speeds or with greatly extended hours per day, strains the already rapid rate of dictation and transcription that would have occurred on the normal days.

**Anchor Date 4: June 11.** The June 11 date for securing the copyright for the Book of Mormon is clearly trustworthy. We have long had the Joseph Smith copy of the copyright form, and when the official court version of that document was found in 2005 at the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. (fig. 1), the information on Joseph Smith's copy was confirmed. The Joseph Smith copy was a secondary, personal copy that he retained. Both the retained copy and the official filed copy were signed on June 11, 1829, by R. R. Lansing, clerk of the U.S. federal district court for the Northern District of New York. This filing was lodged in the court's office in Utica, New York.

As a bonus, attached to that official copy at the Library of Congress was a previously unknown printed mock-up sheet of the title page of the Book of Mormon. The wording (though not the font or layout) is identical to the final printed version of the title page. The mock-up sheet was printed on a letterpress; it was folded as was normally done with filed legal documents in that day, and it was identified and dated. It is not known who printed it or how much time it took to have that done. Perhaps Joseph or Hyrum had already been in contact with a printer such as E. B. Grandin, who supplied the copyright form and information about how to file the form with the federal court. This single sheet was folded and kept with the copyright form, and on the back of this printed page the name of Joseph Smith was written, and it is dated June 11, 1829.<sup>46</sup>

---

45. "History, circa June 1839–circa 1841 [Draft 2]," 34.

46. Illustrations found in "Gallery Guide," in John W. Welch, ed., *The Worlds of Joseph Smith* (Provo, Utah: BYU Studies, 2005), 136–37; see also *BYU Studies* 44, no. 4 (2005): 136–37.

It is unknown who delivered this certificate to the clerk of the court. Was it Joseph? Oliver? Martin Harris? Did the clerk happen to be in Palmyra or around Fayette facilitating such filings, or did someone make the six-day round trip from Fayette to Utica and back to handle this filing? It is true that Oliver Cowdery's handwriting is not on the original manuscript for 1 Nephi 4:20–16:1, and so he might have gone to Utica or elsewhere to perfect this filing while someone else acted as scribe. However, I figure that, at a regular pace, only three days would have been normally available for Joseph to cover those chapters, and the journey took six days. So perhaps it was Martin who made the trip.<sup>47</sup> Martin Harris was probably more available than anyone else and would have had a very strong interest in seeing that the copyright was secured. Still, one cannot know for sure who carried the form to be filed.

What the copyright filing tells us for sure is that the title page of the Book of Mormon was finished and written before June 11.

**Anchor Date 5: June 30.** The completion of the translation by the end of June 1829 is quite well established. In 1881, David Whitmer stated that “the translation at my father’s occupied about one month, that is, from June 1st to July 1st, 1829.”<sup>48</sup> Many details corroborate and refine this timing, as do numerous connections between other specific events and the progress of the translation, as shown on the five-page chart on pages 45–49. Around Sunday, June 28, the translation was finished, and word was delivered that evening to Joseph Smith Sr. and Lucy in Manchester inviting them to come to Fayette, with Martin Harris, to celebrate. The next day, perhaps Monday, June 29, they arrived just before sunset, and the next morning, they read from the Book of Mormon manuscript, sang, and prayed, and David Whitmer, Oliver Cowdery, and Martin Harris went directly with Joseph to where they received their previously promised manifestation by the angel Moroni. On Wednesday, June 30, or perhaps the first day or two of July, they all gathered at the Smith home in Manchester, where the Eight Witnesses were allowed to handle the plates. Then the testimonies of the Witnesses were written, since soon thereafter they would appear in the preface to the first edition of the Book of Mormon.<sup>49</sup>

---

47. Black and Porter, *Martin Harris*, 139.

48. David Whitmer, interview by *Kansas City Daily Journal*, June 5, 1881, cited as document 86 in Welch, “Miraculous Timing,” 166.

49. John Whitmer, “Address,” *Messenger and Advocate* 2 (March 1836): 286–87, cited as document 101 in Welch, “Miraculous Timing,” 177–78; John

Thus, for present purposes, as far as I am aware, no evidence suggests that any of the translation continued after June 30. It is hard to imagine a time or place for any translation to have occurred during the month of July. By the first of July, Joseph had relocated to Manchester, where Joseph and Martin began contacting printers. Joseph met unsuccessfully with Grandin in Palmyra and then with printer Thurlow Weed in Rochester, New York (a fair distance northwest of Palmyra). Then Joseph met successfully with Elihu Marshall (a Quaker book publisher also in Rochester) and, finally, this time successfully, again with Grandin in Palmyra. Joseph was with Martin Harris during some of this time, but he was not with Oliver, who was in Fayette at that time. Negotiations with printers could have begun in June, but it makes more sense for those negotiations to have occupied Joseph's full attention in early July. It is unlikely that Joseph carried any of the original manuscript with him as he met with these publishers.

Indeed, it appears that the original manuscript was not in Joseph's possession in July, so he could not have continued to work on the translation past the end of June. In July, those priceless pages were probably with Oliver in Fayette, both for protection (away from Palmyra) and so that Oliver could begin producing the printer's manuscript, so they could get the book to press as soon as possible, although it is unknown when Oliver actually began his laborious task of copying over the entire manuscript of the Book of Mormon. As Royal Skousen has shown, "There are very few signs of any editing or Joseph changing his mind about the translation"<sup>50</sup> anywhere on the original manuscript, whether during the translation or at any time afterwards.

### **How Many Days Did the Translation Take?**

In answering the questions of how many days the translation took and how precise we can be about that time frame, we need to know (1) how many actual days Joseph and his scribe had and (2) how many words per day, on average, they needed to write to finish.

---

Whitmer, quoted in "History, 1838–1856, Volume C-1 [2 November 1838–31 July 1842]," 913, Joseph Smith Papers, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-c-1-2-november-1838-31-july-1842/95>, cited as document 102 in Welch, "Miraculous Timing," 178; Black and Porter, *Martin Harris*, 141–48.

50. Skousen, *Original Manuscript*, 6.

The total number of days, from April 7 to June 30, inclusive, is eighty-five. This explains the use of that number in some estimates. Other estimates mention seventy-five, sixty-five, sixty-three, or sixty days.<sup>51</sup> Differences in these estimates occur because, even though it is clear that not each of the eighty-five total days was available in whole or in part for translation work, it is not clear how many days, let alone which days, should be excluded from the total.

In the chart, I have excluded eleven full days,<sup>52</sup> including days such as May 18–19 or June 1–4 or other timespans, when it is reasonably clear that Joseph was on trips or otherwise identifiably occupied, during which no translation could have occurred at all. These eleven days have been eliminated because of the following events:

---

51. The days worked or available have been expressed as follows, almost all within a relatively similar time frame: “less than 60 working days” (Welch and Rathbone, “Book of Mormon Translation by Joseph Smith,” 1:210, in 1992); “total of 60 working days” (Remini, *Joseph Smith*, 61–65, in 2002); “approximately 60 days” (Backman, “Book of Mormon, Translation of,” 157–60, in 2003); 63 days (Bushman, “Recovery of the Book of Mormon,” 21–38, in 1997); 63 days (adding 45 plus 12 plus 6 days) (John W. Welch, “The Miraculous Translation of the Book of Mormon,” in *Opening the Heavens: Accounts of Divine Manifestation, 1820–1844*, ed. John W. Welch, 1st ed. [Provo: BYU Studies, 2005], 101); about 63 days (Wunderli, *Imperfect Book*, 25–26, in 2013); “65 or fewer working days” and 85 days is the maximum, both available and unavailable, not the days spent translating (Welch, “I Have a Question,” 46–47, in 1988); “about 65 working days” (Neal A. Maxwell, “By the Gift and Power of God,” *Ensign* 27 [January 1997]: 36–41; reprinted in *Echoes and Evidences of the Book of Mormon*, ed. Donald W. Parry, Daniel C. Peterson, and John W. Welch [Provo, Utah: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 2002], 1–15; pages cited hereafter refer to the *Ensign* version); “no more than sixty-five to seventy-five total days” (Welch, “How Long Did It Take to Translate the Book of Mormon?” 1–8); 74 days as the maximum available time (Welch, “Miraculous Timing,” 119, in 2017); 75 days (Kirkham, “Writing of the Book of Mormon,” 341, in 1941); “less than 90 days” (MacKay and Dirkmaat, *From Darkness unto Light*, 114, 119–20, in 2015); 90 days for the bulk of it (Scott Dunn, “Automaticity and the Dictation of the Book of Mormon,” in *American Apocrypha: Essays on the Book of Mormon*, ed. Dan Vogel and Brent Lee Metcalfe [Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2002], 30); 90 days, plus 9 months to ponder in 1828–1829 and to revise in 1829 (Palmer, *Insider’s View*, 66, in 2002). At a rate of 8 printed pages a day, the total needed time would be 66 days to do the 531 pages of the current Book of Mormon, or 74 days for the 589 pages of the 1830 edition.

52. For documentation on these days, see the respective dates in Welch, “Miraculous Translation,” 104–14.



- Trip to Colesville and back at least two days
  - Move to Fayette, with time to pack and unpack at least four days
  - Handling copyright forms, proofing title page one day
  - Sunday June 14, baptisms in Seneca Lake; letter written one day
  - About June 21, Oliver unavailable, Articles of Church recorded one day
  - June 28, visitors and Three Witnesses experience one day
  - June 30, in Manchester, Eight Witnesses experience one day
- = total eleven days

For computational purposes, it is not crucial where within the total time frame those specific days fell. It matters only that those events happened and approximately how much time they would have taken. Thus the number eighty-five gets reduced by eleven to leave seventy-four, which is the number listed on the last page of the chart below for the “maximum possible days available” for the translation from April 7 to June 30.

In addition, there must have been many days during that time period that were only partially available for translation work.<sup>53</sup> Such amounts of time should not be completely ignored. On the chart, this sort of time has been reflected only in the average number of pages that would have needed to be translated within the overall time frame. These probable time demands would have been spent on various days for such things as:

- Another trip to Colesville sometime in April for supplies (at least two days)
- Talking to Oliver Cowdery about translating, gifts, and progress
- Business (including arranging to pay his second installment to Isaac Hale)
- Farming, household chores, and personal time
- Twelve Sundays (assuming slightly reduced working hours for Sabbath rest and worship)
- Priesthood restorations

---

53. For documentation of these activities or demands on time, see the respective dates in Welch, “Miraculous Translation,” 104–14.

- Baptisms in Harmony
- Time with Samuel Smith and his baptism
- Teaching and baptizing Hyrum Smith
- Greeting and satisfying David Whitmer in Harmony
- Likely interruptions from various curious people and harassment from neighbors
- Arranging to ordain priests and teachers per Doctrine and Covenants 18:32
- Planning for and gathering the Eight Witnesses
- Travel to Manchester the end of June, around June 29
- Beginning to contact possible publishers about printing the title page single sheet

And finally, at least one more day can be reserved to allow for the process of receiving, delivering, and recording thirteen revelations now included in the Doctrine and Covenants:

Section	# of Words	Summary
6	1,124	to Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery, offering encouragement, patience
7	252	about John the Apostle not tasting death
8	389	to Oliver Cowdery
9	397	to Oliver Cowdery, translation not his gift, think before asking
10:38–70	937	instruction on where to begin translating in Fayette
11	789	to Hyrum Smith
12	232	to Joseph Knight
13	66	the words of John the Baptist on May 15, 1829
14	302	to David Whitmer
15	139	to John Whitmer
16	140	to Peter Whitmer
17	311	to the Three Witnesses before viewing the plates
18	1,126	to Oliver Cowdery and David Whitmer
<i>Total</i>		6,124 words

The total number of words in these thirteen revelations is 6,124. Assuming twenty words per minute—which may be on the fast side—the time it would take to dictate and transcribe these individual sections

computes to another 306 minutes, or at least five hours, or close to one more full day, allowing time for stopping, discussing, and interviewing and seeking, receiving, recording, and delivering the revelation to the recipient, as well as talking about it, getting back to work on the translation, and so on. These thirteen revelations in April, May, and June must be taken into account when estimating the amount of time and effort required to bring forth the Book of Mormon translation during those same months.

Taken all together, these numbers yield a total of only 57 to 63 available full-time working days—74 minus 11 to 17 days. Perhaps these interruptions did not require quite that many hours or that many half-days, but even if that were the case, it would appear that not many more than the equivalent of about 60 actual working days would have been available in April, May, and June 1829. The timing is remarkable. As discussed above, because the amount of translation and transcription work accomplished from September 1828 to March 1829 was probably relatively little, and because Joseph probably had learned to translate more efficiently as he brought forth the lost manuscript pages in 1828, and because Oliver was no doubt more skillful as a scribe than Martin Harris or others had been, the work most likely went faster in April, May, and June 1829 than it had in 1828, which helps to explain the feasibility of the rapidity of the translation in 1829.

### **Linking Translation Progress with Words in These Thirteen Revelations**

It is interesting to connect these thirteen sections in the Doctrine and Covenants that were received in April, May, or June with the timing and sequence of the translation of passages in the Book of Mormon. Beyond the fact that receiving and recording these revelations took time, these revelations can be connected to the unfolding of words and phrases within the Book of Mormon itself. These correlations do not affect estimations of how long the translation took, but they do suggest a little more clearly approximate times when those revelations might have been received as well as when certain portions of the Book of Mormon were translated. For present purposes, these thirteen revelations have simply been positioned on the chart on days close to where some of their phrases connect with relatable Book of Mormon texts. This chronological coalescing happens fairly consistently and distinctively, offering a stream of interconnections.

Doctrine and Covenants 8 can be placed at about April 9, which is approximately the time of the translation of Mosiah 8. Both of those texts deal with the power to translate.<sup>54</sup>

The phrases in Doctrine and Covenants 9, dated to around April 26, connect with words in Alma 11 or 40, which would have been translated around that date.<sup>55</sup>

Doctrine and Covenants 7 has been placed on May 21 because of possible connections to 3 Nephi 28.<sup>56</sup> Doctrine and Covenants 7 deals with the Apostle John not tasting death. That question was most relevant to the blessing that Jesus gave to the Three Nephites that they would not taste death either.

The words “deny not” appear in the revelation given to Hyrum in Doctrine and Covenants 11:25. Those words may connect with the “deny nots” in Moroni 1:2 and 10:7, 8, and 33,<sup>57</sup> translated around the end of May.

On June 14, Oliver wrote a letter to David Whitmer that day that contains the phrase “the worth of souls is great in the sight of God.” Those words are also found in Doctrine and Covenants 18:10, as well as in some Book of Mormon passages translated earlier, and so it makes sense to date section 18 a bit earlier than June 14. So I have placed it in the proximity of June 8, not long after Joseph’s arrival in Fayette with Oliver and David, to whom section 18 was directed. These, of course, are just interesting approximations.

But more stunningly, it is known that a two-page document entitled “Articles of the Church of Christ” was composed by Oliver Cowdery

---

54. As is similarly suggested by Vogel, *Joseph Smith*, 171–74.

55. Vogel, *Joseph Smith*, 171–74, connects Doctrine and Covenants 8 and 9 with Mosiah 7 and 8, but Doctrine and Covenants 9 fits as well, if not better, with Alma 11 or 40, translated later in April.

56. Others have connected Doctrine and Covenants 7 with the disappearance of Alma the Younger in Alma 45:18. See MacKay and Dirkmaat, *From Darkness unto Light*, 122. But the textual connections with 3 Nephi 28:1 (“what desirest thou?” D&C 7:1), 3 Nephi 28:2 (“speedily,” 7:4), 3 Nephi 28:7 (“never taste death” and “power over death,” 7:2), 3 Nephi 28:9 (“bring souls,” 7:2), and 3 Nephi 28:7 and 8 (2 occurrences, “come in my glory,” 7:3) make 3 Nephi 28 cumulatively a stronger candidate.

57. See also six other occurrences of “deny” in Moroni 1:3; 7:17; 8:19; and three occurrences in 10:32, making this a dominant theme from the beginning to the end of the book of Moroni.

sometime in June.<sup>58</sup> It is 1,551 words long. How long did it take him to generate that significant document? The better part of a day, one would think. I have placed this document on Sunday, June 21, because it quotes from verse 4 of the recently received Doctrine and Covenants 18 and it also meaningfully and precisely quotes at least 36 verses from the Book of Mormon (verifiably following the original manuscript), many of them in full, namely (in this order): 3 Nephi 11:32, 23–27; Moroni 3:1, 4, 2–3; 3 Nephi 18:12; 2 Nephi 26:33; Moroni 6:6; 4:1–3; 5:1–2; 3 Nephi 18:28–33; 18:22; Alma 31:10; 1:32; 12:15; 3 Nephi 18:31; Doctrine and Covenants 18:34; 3 Nephi 9:15, 16; Doctrine and Covenants 18:34; 3 Nephi 9:18; Ether 5:6; and 2 Nephi 9:7. In writing this document, Oliver must have taken time to remember, locate, arrange, and copy out these passages, quoting them exactly. This document powerfully summarizes key ecclesiastical and administrative provisions that are scattered throughout the Book of Mormon, dealing with performing the ordinance of baptism, the elders ordaining priests and teachers, administering the sacrament, excommunications, laws of the church, promising blessings, invoking authority, and preparing to stand before Christ and being saved eternally in his kingdom through his infinite Atonement. Addressing all of these topics is an impressive and time-absorbing feat, especially since the original manuscript had no finding aids, no chapter and verse numbers, and still remained to be mentally processed and reflectively studied.

All of this explains my thinking in spreading the chapters of the Book of Mormon across the total elapsed time of 74 days on the chart. The suggested dates on which specific chapters may have been translated are not to be taken as certain; they are just statistically feasible estimates. The chart also spreads the distraction times evenly over the

---

58. Cowdery's original document is at <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/appendix-3-articles-of-the-church-of-christ-june-1829/1>. For a superb documentary analysis of this document, see Scott H. Faulring, "An Examination of the 1829 'Articles of the Church of Christ' in Relation to Section 20 of the Doctrine and Covenants," *BYU Studies* 43, no. 4 (2004): 57–91. For a study of the extensive uses of the Book of Mormon in the early administrative history of the Church, see John W. Welch, "The Book of Mormon: The Keystone of LDS Church Organization and Administration," in *A Firm Foundation: Church Organization and Administration*, ed. David J. Whittaker and Arnold K. Garr (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2011), 15–57; or John W. Welch, "The Book of Mormon as the Keystone of Church Administration," *Religious Educator* 12, no. 2 (2011): 83–117.

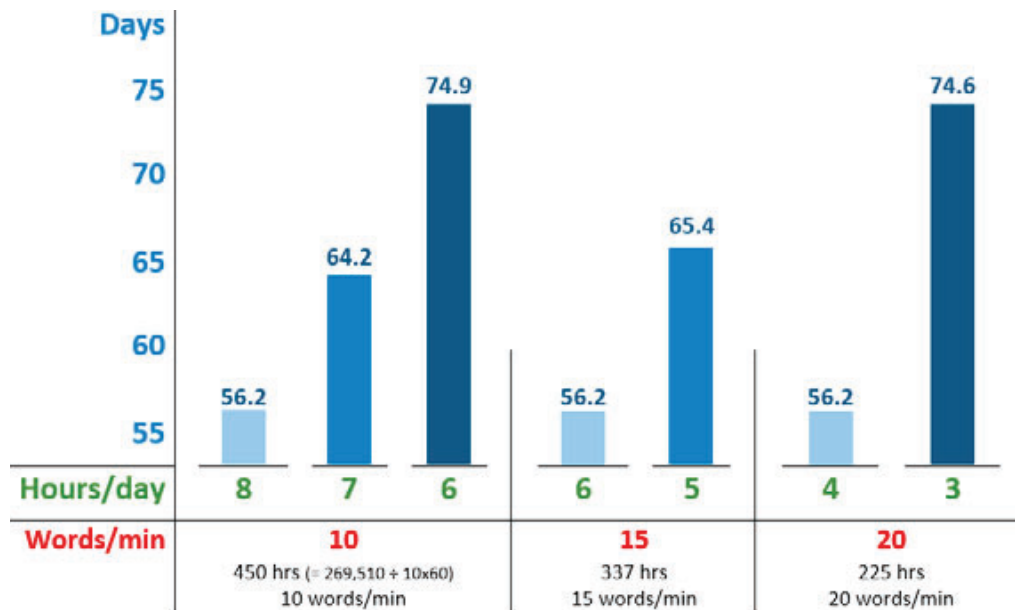


same 74 days, making the assumption that Joseph’s rate of translation was uniform hour by hour and day by day. And in addition, the thirteen revelations found in the Doctrine and Covenants from this period may be aligned meaningfully with the distribution of this chronological data over the months of April, May, and June.

### Rates and Length of Translation

I now turn to the question of how quickly (or slowly) Joseph and Oliver must have been going in order to translate the total of 269,510 words in the Book of Mormon within the available days on this schedule. Is it even possible for them to have worked fast enough? The answer is yes, as shown on this multivariant graph, which mathematically shows the number of days they would have needed to work to translate the whole Book of Mormon if they went 10 words per minute, 15 words per minute, or 20 words per minute, and if they worked 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, or 8 hours per day. About 65 days is within range.

### Total Elapsed Time at Various Rates of Translation of 269,510 Total Words



The horizontal axis along the bottom of this graph displays, from left to right, the results assuming that Joseph and Oliver were working at a rate of 10, 15, or 20 words per minute, while working variously for 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, or 3 hours per day. The vertical axis then shows how many hours

(expressed as days) it would have taken them, at a given rate of words per minute, to complete the 269,510 words in the book. The faster they went, the fewer hours per day would have been needed.

At 10 words per minute (left section of this bar graph), the full translation would take 450 hours. Working 8 hours a day, they could translate and transcribe the 269,510 words within 56.2 full-working-day equivalents, slow but steady. If they worked at faster rates (15 or 20 words per minute, shown in the areas in the middle and on the right of the graph), while working an hour or two fewer per day (6 or 4 hours per day), they could also have gotten the job done within that same 56.2 working-day length of time.

As shown in the middle of the graph, working at a rate of 15 words per minute, the total time of translation would have taken 337 hours. And as seen on the right side of the graph, at the rate of 20 words per minute, only 225 total hours would have been needed. Those numbers of total hours can then be translated into possible numbers of days worked.

Several of the resulting hours-per-day and words-per-minute options yield elapsed time figures that fall within the realm of feasibility, but the latitude is not wide. The parameters here do not allow much variation beyond the values shown on this graph. Needing to work more slowly would push the project beyond the number of hours per day probably available or the maximum of 64 working-days reasonably available, given all of the other interruptions one has to factor into the equations here. But, within these parameters, several of these rates and times work. Oliver's statement that they worked "day after day . . . uninterrupted" was correct. To make these numbers work within the available time frame, they indeed needed to work continuously, diligently, and largely without interruption.

### **Experiments Replicating the Experience and Rate of the Translation**

In order to test the feasibility of these calculations of how fast Joseph and Oliver actually could have worked, my wife, Jeannie, and I decided to try it out ourselves. We picked two pages in Royal Skousen's Yale edition of the Book of Mormon,<sup>59</sup> since that version breaks the text lines into thought clauses that would have been about the length of each translational unit. At first, I played the role of Joseph and read the first

---

59. Royal Skousen, *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2009).

line slowly and distinctly, while she, playing the role of Oliver, began immediately writing those words down. When she reached the end of that line, she read it back to me, and I confirmed that it was correct or pointed out mistakes. Then I paused, gazed again at the page, uncovered the next line, and read it aloud, which Jeannie likewise recorded and read back. And so we proceeded to the end of the page. All the while, we had a stopwatch running, and at the end, we counted up the number of words on the page and the time elapsed and divided the number of words by the number of minutes to get a rate of words per minute for our work on those two pages.

We found the experience intellectually awakening and spiritually engaging enough that we repeated this activity in my stake scripture class. We all divided up into fifteen groups of three people, with one person playing Joseph, another Oliver, and the third acting as the time-keeper. The experience was quite electrifying for most people in the class.

Altogether, our results showed empirically that a translation rate of right around 20 words per minute was quite possible. But we couldn't imagine sustaining that rate hour after hour, day after day. Our hands got tired, and the one playing Joseph needed to catch his or her breath and clear his or her voice. We used ballpoint pens. We imagined Oliver dipping and using his quill pen. We wondered if they didn't work a little slower, and thus might have worked an hour or two longer on each average day.

Although not strictly scientific, this exercise produced a flood of experiential insights. The stress of trying to achieve a maximum accuracy took a substantial toll on us. People playing the role of Joseph struggled to keep their minds focused on the line at hand as they waited for the person playing Oliver to finish. Their thoughts wandered back to foregoing lines or anticipated what might come next. We noticed more details in the text than ever before. We wondered what Joseph, Oliver, and Emma close by would have thought when hearing these things for the first time. How long did Joseph take after Oliver read back a line to him? Did the translation process work seamlessly and promptly, or were there long pauses to collect his thoughts? Those playing the role of Oliver had to be patient and pay very close attention (as Oliver had been counseled to do in Doctrine and Covenants 6:18–19).

In general, people in our trial wanted to stop to enjoy impressive gems that emerged amid blocks of ordinary narration, but the inexorable process did not allow them the time. Comments regarding the exercise included “My body was tense”; “the doctrine and prose was amazingly

coherent. It is inconceivable to me that he was able to maintain coherence under those conditions”; “even Mormon’s long and complex sentences all made sense in the end”; “it gave us a greater appreciation for the line upon line precept”; “I had empathy for Joseph and Oliver who did this for hours each day”; and “it was a spiritual experience to get these words a bit at a time, coming spontaneously forth.” Several who participated in this experiment were eager to try it again with their families, for youth activities, or in other classes. With everyone taking turns with all three of these roles, it was an unforgettable hour.

Other people have written the entire Book of Mormon out by hand to provide personalized manuscripts for their children and grandchildren. One person, Hunter Desotel, has used text-to-speech software to vocalize the text which he simultaneously wrote down with a quill pen and ink, a couple of hours per day for 115 days between December 13, 2017, and May 27, 2018. These sustained undertakings produced great respect for the accuracy of Oliver as a scribe and for Joseph as an articulator.

### Conclusions and Reflections

While it is up to each individual to determine what this information might mean and whether or not it might be useful to them in generating insights or nourishing faith,<sup>60</sup> all of this background data can offer readers new openings into the Book of Mormon.

Information about the speed with which the translation happened may affect the way any reader interprets and experiences this book. That background can be useful, and not just as cerebral calisthenics, as Elder Neal A. Maxwell once put it. The impact of this information can be fascinating, puzzling, and perhaps even astonishing.

Although it is impossible for readers to relive the translation experience, one may apply the foregoing information to any given day in April, May, or June 1829, to imagine what that day might have been like for

---

60. See John W. Welch, “The Power of Evidence in the Nurturing of Faith,” in *Nurturing Faith through the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1995), 149–86; reprinted in Donald W. Parry, Daniel C. Peterson, and John W. Welch, eds., *Echoes and Evidences of the Book of Mormon* (Provo, Utah: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 2002), 17–54; repurposed in “The Role of Evidence in Religious Discussion,” in *No Weapon Shall Prosper: New Light on Sensitive Issues*, ed. Robert L. Millet (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University 2011), 259–94.

Joseph and his scribes. By taking any block of three chapters or so, one can imagine what Oliver may have heard on that given day as he heard those words for the first time. Profound teachings, unique vocabulary, and impressive phrases would have greeted Joseph and Oliver among the words found in the voices of Benjamin, Abinadi, Alma, Helaman, Jesus, Mormon, and Moroni. With that model in mind, readers today can strive to read each page as a fresh encounter.

Contextualizing any document or past event is always helpful in understanding it on its own terms. Thus, awareness of how the Book of Mormon came forth may inform, if not transform, a reader's reception of it. This aspect of its dictation delivery may provide a pervasive interpretive lens that sharpens one's focus on details, structures, or elements of orality within the book.

By way of comparative literature, readers may also make instructive use of this information in comparing the Book of Mormon's composition with the manner in which other books have been written. Of course, biblical books did not come forth in a manner anything like the coming forth of the Book of Mormon, which is in a class by itself. Still, one might imagine how differently other books of scripture might be read if we knew as much about how those books were brought forth as we know about the Book of Mormon.

Knowing how quickly it was dictated amplifies the significance of many kinds of details, helping astute readers notice and value literary features that would otherwise go underappreciated. For example, in Alma 36:22, Alma quotes exactly twenty-two words from Lehi as found in 1 Nephi 1:8.<sup>61</sup> Knowing that the passage in Alma was translated in Harmony in April, perhaps about April 24, while the Lehi text was not supplied until June, perhaps about June 5 in Fayette, might be relevant to how those passages and many other instances of complex intertextuality are read.

The pace of the translation might generate new questions yet to be answered. How might the record's ability to keep the lifespans of Alma's genealogy all in line be reanalyzed if one realizes that that lineage-history is widely dispersed among passages that were translated over a span of six weeks, from April 11 to May 22? How might the timing of the translation affect one's thoughts about the significance of the fact

---

61. See John W. Welch and J. Gregory Welch, *Charting the Book of Mormon: Visual Aids for Personal Study and Teaching* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1999), chart 103, available at <https://byustudies.byu.edu/book-of-mormon-charts>.



that the thirty names in the Jaredite genealogy in Ether 1—running from Ether back in time to Jared—would have been dictated on one day, and then they were repeated (apparently without any notes) in exactly the opposite order—from Jared down to Ether—as the story of those Jaredite rulers was translated over the next three days in Ether 2–11?<sup>62</sup>

How might the sequence of the translation affect one’s reading of the account of the great destructions in 3 Nephi 8, which was translated about May 12, as it fulfills prophecies that were detailed in 1 Nephi 19, which was translated a month later?<sup>63</sup> The antithetically parallel words of Alma the Younger as he came out of his three-day coma were translated in Mosiah 27 on about April 13, while his chiasmic retelling of that conversion event twenty years later in Alma 36 (which was translated about ten days later on April 24, 1829) reincorporated many of the same distinctive words and phrases.<sup>64</sup>

The seven tribes in the Nephite world (Nephites, Jacobites, Josephites, Zoramites, Lamanites, Lemuelites, and Ishmaelites) are listed three times in the Book of Mormon.<sup>65</sup> The first instance dictated by Joseph comes in a rather inconspicuous spot in 4 Nephi 1:38, translated about May 21, simply conveying a sense of complete inclusivity. A page later, but coming from a century later historically, the same seven tribes are listed exactly in the same order in Mormon 1:8, now marking their division into two warring camps. A third occurrence of this precise seven-tribe list comes later in the translation time frame in Jacob 1:13, where

---

62. See “Why Does the Book of Ether Begin with Such a Long Genealogy?” Book of Mormon Central, November 21, 2016, <https://knowwhy.bookofmormoncentral.org/content/why-does-the-book-of-ether-begin-with-such-a-long-genealogy>.

63. In this connection, consider the correlation between the earth, air, fire, and water elements of destruction mentioned in 1 Nephi 19 and those reported in 3 Nephi 8–9 (Welch and Welch, *Charting the Book of Mormon*, chart 49) and also the names of these cosmic powers in 1 Nephi 19 and 3 Nephi 8–9 as they compare with the names of the rebellious evil forces in 1 Enoch, listed in John W. Welch, “Enoch Translated,” review of *1 Enoch 1: A Commentary on the Book of 1 Enoch, Chapter 1–36; 81–108* by George W. E. Nickelsburg, *FARMS Review* 16, no. 1 (2004): 415–16.

64. John W. Welch, “Three Accounts of Alma’s Conversion,” in Welch, *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, 150–53; Welch and Welch, *Charting the Book of Mormon*, chart 106.

65. Diane E. Wirth, “Revisiting the Seven Lineages of the Book of Mormon and the Seven Tribes of Mesoamerica,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 52, no. 4 (2013): 77–88.

the reader now learns that this list had its cultural origins back in the days of Jacob. Here, this tribally formative ordering serves other purposes, probably being based on Lehi's final blessings to these seven lineages in 2 Nephi 1:28, 30; 2:1; 3:1 and coming about a month later in the translation, about June 24.

Similarly, the impressive teachings of Abinadi in Mosiah 12–15 came forth early in the process, about April 10. As John Hilton has shown,<sup>66</sup> thirteen cases of Abinadi's phraseology appear in Alma's words to his son Corianton in Alma 39–43, which were translated on April 26, about 130 pages later. Those allusions make particular sense when one allows that Alma the Younger grew up listening to his father speak of the words and doctrines that he had learned from Abinadi himself.

At an objective level, these details further provide more developed answers to questions that have been asked for decades about when and how fast the Book of Mormon was produced. As a by-product, this study shows that the historical documents relating to this somewhat obscure chapter in early Latter-day Saint history interlock more accurately than might otherwise have been expected. Such information can thus enhance trust in the process by which it came forth. In the midst of uncertainties, the anchor dates and the feasibility of the rate of translation can be known with reassuring confidence by considerable evidence from multiple independent historical documents and confirmed by the manuscripts of the Book of Mormon. In 1831, Joseph said it was not intended for people to know the particulars of how the Book of Mormon came forth,<sup>67</sup> and indeed no one knows how the translation instruments given to him by Moroni worked. One may surmise that even Joseph could not begin to explain the miraculous aspects of the process. But the book happened, and enough can be known about when it happened and how much time it took. And at a religious level, that may be enough.

At a personal level, this information may add to any reader's literary or devotional appreciation of the Book of Mormon—by any account an extraordinary book. Oliver Cowdery's personal reaction to his experience as Joseph's scribe was one of gratitude: "To sit under the sound

---

66. John Hilton III, Sunny Hendry Hafen, and Jaron Hansen, "Samuel and His Sources," *BYU Studies Quarterly* 56, no. 3 (2017): 115–39.

67. "Minute Book 2," 13, Joseph Smith Papers, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/minute-book-2/15>, cited as document 11 in Welch, "Miraculous Timing," 131.

of a voice dictated by the inspiration of heaven, awakened [in me] the utmost gratitude.”<sup>68</sup> Modern Church leaders have said: “You and I owe many people for their lives in bringing us the Book of Mormon;”<sup>69</sup> and “[this book] is one of God’s priceless gifts to us,”<sup>70</sup> for which people may well feel abundantly grateful.

At the same time, the feat of bringing forth the Book of Mormon within its tight time frame increases appreciation for the achievement of the Prophet Joseph Smith, which can, in turn, increase awe and reverence for God and the word of God. As Elder Maxwell once observed, “One marvel is the very rapidity with which Joseph was translating.”<sup>71</sup> I would add that we should note the marvel of perceiving and vocalizing the text, line after line, with no time for research, for collocating scattered scriptural phrases, for keeping track of numerous threads, for developing an array of characters and their stylistic voices, or for composing coherent accounts.

Such temporal matters may serve more than merely mundane purposes. Mortal beings can know more logically that God loves and cares about them if they know that God cares about time. Being in space and time, God knows about times and seasons, and he gives signs of the times. He works within historical time in order to fulfill covenants he has made. He also gives people time, time to repent, which is the essence of his mercy (see Alma 42:4, 22). Above all, he wants to lovingly bless all his children, for time and for all eternity.

Thus, it can be hoped that this information will help some readers to see how the Book of Mormon sets out to accomplish its self-proclaimed purpose—“unto the convincing” of people everywhere “that Jesus is the Christ, the Eternal God, manifesting himself unto all nations.” It would be a bonus added to the value of this objective data if users experienced any such spiritual impressions as responses to information presented in this study. Such investigations cannot create belief, but these data points

---

68. “History, 1834–1836,” 47, Joseph Smith Papers, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1834-1836/49>.

69. Maxwell, “By the Gift and Power of God,” 36.

70. Tad R. Callister, “God’s Compelling Witness: The Book of Mormon,” *Ensign* 47 (November 2017): 109. See also Russell M. Nelson, “The Book of Mormon: What Would Your Life Be Like without It?” *Ensign* 47 (November 2017): 60–63.

71. Maxwell, “By the Gift and Power of God,” 39.

may help maintain a climate in which spiritual feelings and rigorous investigation may interactively flourish.<sup>72</sup>

### Estimated Day-by-Day Translation in 1829

<i>Date (1829)</i>	<i>Possible Chapters Translated</i>	<i>Event</i>
March	Mosiah 1	A few pages translated. The work of translation resumed where it left off after the loss of the manuscript pages in 1828.
April 5 Sun.		<b>Oliver Cowdery arrived in Harmony, Pennsylvania.*</b>
6		<b>Joseph purchased property from Emma's father.*</b> About this time, D&C 6 was received, directed to Oliver Cowdery as he began serving as Joseph Smith's scribe.
7	Mosiah 2–4	<b>Oliver began working as Joseph's scribe.*</b>
8	Mosiah 5–7	
9	Mosiah 8–11	About this time, D&C 8 was received, directed to Oliver about the power to translate. Compare Mosiah 8:11–16, speaking of King Mosiah's power to translate.
10	Mosiah 12–16	
11	Mosiah 17–20	
12 Sun.	Mosiah 21–25	About this time, Oliver wrote a letter to David Whitmer.
13	Mosiah 26–28	
14	Mosiah 29 and Alma 1–2	
15	Alma 3–6	

72. I refer to the British theologian Austin Farrar in speaking about C. S. Lewis (and quoted by Elder Maxwell on several occasions): "Though argument does not create conviction, lack of it destroys belief. What seems to be proved may not be embraced; but what no one shows that ability to defend is quickly abandoned. Rational argument does not create belief, but it maintains a climate in which belief may flourish." Austin Farrar, "Grete Clerk," in Jocelyn Gibb, comp., *Light on C. S. Lewis* (New York: Harcourt and Brace, 1965), 26; cited by Neal A. Maxwell, "Discipleship and Scholarship," *BYU Studies* 32, no. 3 (1992): 5.

16	Alma 7–10	
17	Alma 11–13	
18	Alma 14–17	
19 Sun.	Alma 18–19	About this time, Oliver wrote a second letter to David Whitmer.
20	Alma 20–23	
21	Alma 24–26	
22	Alma 27–30	
23	Alma 31–33	
24	Alma 34–36	
25	Alma 37–38	
April 26 Sun.	Alma 39–40	About this time, D&C 9 was received (compare D&C 9:14, “a hair of your head shall not be lost, and you shall be lifted up at the last day,” with Alma 11:44 or 40:23).
27	Alma 41–43	
28	Alma 44–45	
29	Alma 46–48	
30	Alma 49–51	
May 1	Alma 52–54	
2	Alma 55–57	
3 Sun.	Alma 58–61	
4	Alma 62–63 and Helaman 1	
5	Helaman 2–4	
6	Helaman 5–7	
7	Helaman 8–10	
8	Helaman 11–13	
9	Helaman 14–16	
10 Sun.	3 Nephi 1–3	
11	3 Nephi 4–6	
12	3 Nephi 7–10	
13	3 Nephi 11–12	
14	3 Nephi 13–15	
15	3 Nephi 16–18	<b>Restoration of the Aaronic Priesthood.*</b> At this time, Joseph and Oliver went into the nearby woods to pray about baptism for the remission of sins, which they had found mentioned in the translation, presumably in 3 Nephi 11:21–12:2.
16	3 Nephi 19–21	



17 Sun.	3 Nephi 22–23	About this time, Oliver wrote a third letter to David Whitmer.
18		About this time, Joseph and Oliver traveled 30 miles to Colesville, New York.
19		Joseph and Oliver returned 30 miles from Colesville. Perhaps at this time, Peter, James, and John appeared to restore the higher priesthood and the power to give the gift of the Holy Ghost, mentioned in 3 Nephi 18:36–38.
20	3 Nephi 24–27	
May 21	3 Nephi 28–30 and 4 Nephi	About this time, D&C 7 may have been received, speaking about John not tasting death. Compare material in the account about the Three Nephites in 3 Nephi 28:1 (“what desirest thou?” D&C 7:1); 28:9 (“bring souls,” 7:2); 28:2 (“speedily,” 7:4); 28:7 (“never taste death,” “power over death” in 7:2).
22	Mormon 1–4	
23	Mormon 5–7	
24 Sun.	Mormon 8–9	
25	Ether 1–3	<b>Samuel Smith was baptized.*</b>
26	Ether 4–7	
27	Ether 8–10	
28	Ether 11–12	Near this date, Hyrum Smith and David Whitmer arrived in Harmony, Pennsylvania.
29	Ether 13–15 and Moroni 1–4	
30	Moroni 5–8	About at this point, D&C 12 was received, directed to Joseph Knight Sr. (compare 12:8, “full of love,” “faith, hope and charity,” with Mosiah 3:19; Ether 12:28; Moro. 7:1; 8:14).
31 Sun.	Moroni 9–10 and title page*	About this time, D&C 11 was revealed to Hyrum. Compare D&C 11:16 (“my gospel”), and 11:25 (“deny not”) with 3 Ne. 27:21 and Moro. 10:8.
June 1		<b>Joseph and Oliver packed and moved from Harmony, Pennsylvania, to Fayette, New York.*</b>
2		Travel to Fayette.
3		Travel to Fayette.
4		Travel to Fayette and unpack. About this time, D&C 10 was finalized, telling Joseph to translate the plates of Nephi (D&C 10:41).

5	Translation resumes with 1 Nephi 1–2	About this time, the voice was heard in Father Whitmer’s chamber authorizing Joseph and Oliver to be ordained elders.
6	1 Nephi 3–6	
7 Sun.	1 Nephi 7–9	About this time, John and Peter Whitmer Sr. were baptized, and D&C 15 and 16 were received.
June 8	1 Nephi 10–12	About this time, D&C 14 was given for David Whitmer.
9	1 Nephi 13–16	About this time, D&C 18 was received (compare 18:20, “church of the devil,” with 1 Ne. 14:10).
10	1 Nephi 17–19	
11		<b>Copyright form was filed in United States District Court for the Northern District of New York, using the full title page as the “title” of the book on the copyright form.*</b>
12	1 Nephi 20–22	
13	2 Nephi 1–3	
14 Sun.		<b>Oliver wrote to Hyrum.*</b> His letter used some words similar to those in 2 Ne. 9:21–23; Mosiah 5:9–10; and Moro. 8. About this time, David and Peter Whitmer Jr. were baptized.
15	2 Nephi 4–6	
16	2 Nephi 7–9	
17	2 Nephi 10–13	
18	2 Nephi 14–19	
19	2 Nephi 20–24	
20	2 Nephi 25–27	
21 Sun.		About this time, Oliver Cowdery composed the “Articles of the Church of Christ.” This document quotes extensively, verbatim, from the original manuscript of 3 Ne. 9:15–16, 18; 11:23–27, 32, 39–40; 18:22, 28–33; 27:8–10, 20; Moro. 3:1–4; 4:1–2; 5:1–2; 6:6; and also from D&C 18:4, 22–25, 31, 34.
22	2 Nephi 28–31	About this time, D&C 17 was received, authorizing Oliver, David, and Martin to obtain a view of the plates (17:2; compare 2 Ne. 27:12).
23	2 Nephi 32–33	About this time, the manifestation of Moroni was given to the Three Witnesses, as prompted by the translation of 2 Ne. 27:12–13.

24	Jacob 1–3	
25	Jacob 4–5	
26	Jacob 6–7	
27	Enos and Jarom	
June 28 Sun.	Omni and Words of Mormon	
29		<b>In Manchester, New York.*</b> About this time, the Eight Witnesses were shown the plates.
30		<b>By this date, the translation was finished.*</b> About this time, the testimonies of the Three and the Eight Witnesses were written.
July		About this time, the preface to the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon was written. It uses at least nine phrases found in the title page or in D&C 10.

\***Bolded texts give historically documentable details.** For historical documentation, see pp. 16–30.

*All other dates are estimates, assuming a relatively consistent rate of translation. Royal Skousen, The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text, has 269,510 words in the original Book of Mormon text. The number of days allotted for the translation of each book in the Book of Mormon corresponds proportionally with the percentage of total words contained in each book, except for Sundays, for which fewer words were counted.*

Large Plates			Small Plates		
	<i>words</i>	<i>percent</i>		<i>words</i>	<i>percent</i>
Mosiah	31,348	11.6	1 Nephi	25,441	9.4
Alma	85,753	31.9	2 Nephi	29,531	11.0
Helaman	20,650	7.7	Jacob	9,212	3.4
3 Nephi	28,801	10.7	Enos	1,177	0.4
4 Nephi	1,980	0.7	Jarom	737	0.3
Mormon	9,483	3.5	Omni	1,406	0.5
Ether	16,720	6.2	Words of Mormon	863	0.3
Moroni	6,140	2.3			
Title Page	268	0.1			

*Maximum number of possible days available for the translation of the Book of Mormon from April 7 to June 30:*

Mosiah–Moroni:	53 days
1 Nephi–Words of Mormon:	<u>21 days</u>
Total:	74 days

---

John W. Welch is the Robert K. Thomas Professor of Law at the J. Reuben Clark Law School and served as the editor in chief of BYU Studies from 1991 to 2018. He was the editor of *Opening the Heavens*, 2d ed. (Provo, Utah: BYU Studies, 2017), and numerous publications on the Book of Mormon, biblical law, the New Testament, Joseph Smith’s legal history, and chiasmus.

This presentation was first delivered as the Laura F. Willes Book of Mormon Lecture at Brigham Young University, November 8, 2017; video available at <https://mi.byu.edu/watch-welch-lecture>; with a shortened version presented under the title of “April 7: A Day Never to Be Forgotten,” at the Book of Mormon Central Conference “Experience the Book of Mormon,” Provo, Utah, April 7, 2018; video available at <https://bookofmormoncentral.org/events/book-of-mormon-central-2018-conference>. This paper combines these two previous presentations.