

# THE 2021 50<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY SIDNEY B. SPERRY SYMPOSIUM

## *A Covenant of Compassion*

### *Caring for the Marginalized and Disadvantaged in the Old Testament*

#### Call for Proposals

In his October 2019 general conference address, President Russell M. Nelson spoke about poverty and other humanitarian concerns, declaring, “As members of the Church, we feel a kinship to those who suffer in any way... We heed an Old Testament admonition: ‘Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy’ [Deuteronomy 15:11].” President Nelson’s linking of Old Testament law with modern social concerns highlights the continued relevancy of the Old Testament for confronting modern challenges, including poverty, ethnocentrism, and the world’s growing refugee crisis.

With this in mind, the 2021 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Sperry Symposium, which will be held at Brigham Young University in October 2021, will focus on Old Testament teachings relating to how society ought to care for groups that are marginalized and disadvantaged. More specifically, this volume will explore how the Old Testament describes, explores, and prescribes justice for groups outside of religious, social, or economic power structures, including non-Israelites, women, children, the poor, or slaves. Because these topics remain urgent today, papers are invited to explicitly connect how Old Testament teachings might apply to current challenges. See the reverse side for a list of suggested topics. Also, as you plan your proposal please read and consider the purposes of the Sidney B. Sperry Symposium as described on the following page.

Proposals should take the form of an abstract of the paper of no more than 300 words containing all of the following: (1) the main thesis of your paper/presentation, (2) a brief outline of the components supporting your main thesis, (3) a summary of your methodology as well as the primary and secondary sources you will consult as evidence and support, and (4) a brief statement concerning how your study will make a significant contribution to previous scholarship on Old Testament social issues and/or how these teachings have or can impact Latter-day Saints.

Following the abstract, please include a short separate statement (25–50 words) outlining your background, qualifications, or preparation so far to address this subject (you should already have completed some research in preparation for writing the proposal). Please include the following information in the heading of your proposal: name, address, phone number, e-mail address, and a working title for your paper. Proposals must be submitted electronically, as an attached Word or PDF document, to Beverly Yellowhorse at [beverly\\_yellowhorse@byu.edu](mailto:beverly_yellowhorse@byu.edu) on or before **February 4, 2020**.

Each submitter will be notified of his or her proposal’s status by **March 4, 2020**. Those whose proposals are accepted for presentation at the symposium must submit final papers, ranging between 15 and 25 pages in length (double-spaced) by **September 2, 2020**. All papers will receive blind peer review by two external reviewers and will be read by the Sperry Symposium Committee. Based upon review, papers will be (1) accepted, (2) accepted with revisions, or (3) rejected. Some of the selected papers will also be featured in the symposium publication, to be released prior to the conference. Proposals and papers must be consistent with the doctrines and practices of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Questions can be addressed to members of the 2021 Sperry Symposium Committee:

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While papers need to be centered in the text of the Old Testament, papers demonstrating the influence of these Old Testament themes in the New Testament and in Restoration scripture and thought are also welcome. Potential paper topics could include but are not limited to:

1. "Strangers" (refugees, foreign workers, resident aliens, etc.)
2. Priests and Levites as "strangers"
3. Connections between sacrifices, tithing, and taking care of those in need
4. Social safety nets (caring for the widows, orphans, etc.)
5. Caring for the poor and needy
6. Legal responsibilities for taking care of those in need
7. Covenant bonds and how those relate to the marginalized and disadvantaged
8. Obligations to family and kin
9. Teachings against accumulating wealth
10. Economic equality/inequality
11. Slavery in the Old Testament and its world
12. Women, gender, and social power in ancient Israel
13. Disability in the Old Testament
14. Violence against Canaanites and other non-Israelites
15. Social justice in the law(s) of Moses
16. Social justice in prophetic books
17. Social justice in Old Testament narrative
18. Social justice in wisdom literature
19. Social justice in a particular Old Testament book or story
20. Social stigmas relating to infertility
21. Theological issues arising out of Old Testament social norms
22. How concerns for social justice in the Brass Plates influenced Book of Mormon authors
23. The depiction of Zion in the Book of Moses
24. The connection between holiness, consecration and Zion
25. How the Doctrine and Covenants draws upon Old Testament passages and themes regarding the poor and needy
26. How modern Church leaders have built on a foundation of Old Testament teachings regarding social justice
27. Which and how Old Testament social teachings apply to Latter-day Saints in the 21<sup>st</sup> century

**Re-statement of Purpose**  
**Sidney B. Sperry Symposium**  
**Religious Education, Brigham Young University**

The purpose of the annual Sperry Symposium is to generate presentations and published papers that increase the scriptural and gospel understanding of members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and other people who wish to access them. Our target audience is Latter-day Saint Gospel Doctrine teachers and other lay members who are nonspecialists in the formal study of the scriptures, but who we hope will better understand and thus better teach the scriptures after viewing Sperry presentations and reading Sperry publications.

Whatever the portion of the standard works being emphasized in a particular Sperry symposium, and whatever the particular topic of an individual paper, all Sperry symposia papers are expected to be academically sound and methodologically well grounded. At the same time, they are expected to be accessible to and faith-affirming for a nonspecialist Latter-day Saint audience.

Sperry papers, including those that are published, are generally encyclopedic or summative with a believing, faith-affirming dimension to them. They do not typically present new research that would otherwise appear in print in discipline-specific journals.

Nothing about the purpose or the intended audience of the Sperry symposia lessens the need for Sperry papers to be historically accurate, up-to-date, fresh, insightful, and meaningful. Such papers will represent well what we term “gospel scholarship,” as they draw upon the scriptures and the best methods and findings of scholarship in the service of educating Saints in a faithful framework.

While the modeling of proper methodologies for studying the scriptures is expected in Sperry papers, such papers are not the place for promoting academic issues in order to further academic conversations. Sperry papers are expected to educate by explaining and contextualizing issues, but are not the place to present theory as fact.

Authors of Sperry papers are encouraged to find the appropriate balance between responsible scholarship and the interests of nonspecialists who are looking for accessible and engaging substance with a believing dimension. Likewise, committee members, individually and collectively, are asked to make judgments based on the considerations presented above. While recognizing this balance can be somewhat subjective, Sperry committees are to ensure that all presentations and publications fall within these broad parameters.

We trust this restatement of the purpose of our Sperry symposia will ensure consistency in the quality and orientation of the presentations as well as the papers that are selected for publication in the annual conference volume. Failure to meet this purpose and to exhibit this balance understandably raises questions for those who view the presentations and read the papers.

**Approved by the Administrative Council of Religious Education, BYU, 2 February 2017**