



Introduction

This volume marks the fiftieth anniversary of the annual Sidney B. Sperry Symposium at Brigham Young University. For half a century, Latter-day Saints have been blessed by scholars and other religious educators who have shared insightful messages from the beloved scriptures of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Their inspiring research on the texts and teachings of the Old Testament, New Testament, Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, and Pearl of Great Price have helped fulfill the Lord's injunction to "seek ye diligently and teach one another words of wisdom; yea, seek ye out of the best books words of wisdom; seek learning, even by study and also by faith" (Doctrine and Covenants 88:118).

In this year's symposium, we focus on the oldest and largest of our standard works, the Old Testament. This year's theme, caring for marginalized and disadvantaged people in the Old Testament, was

prompted by repeated calls from living prophets and other Church leaders that members of the Church should “lead out”¹ in confronting modern social challenges such as poverty,² racism,³ sexism,⁴ nationalism,⁵ religious discrimination,⁶ and the world’s growing refugee crisis.⁷ As Elder Dale G. Renlund taught, “How we deal with advantages and disadvantages is part of life’s test. We will be judged not so much by what we say but by how we treat the vulnerable and disadvantaged.”⁸

In the October 2019 general conference, President Russell M. Nelson highlighted some of these humanitarian concerns, declaring, “As members of the Church, we feel a kinship to those who suffer in any way. As sons and daughters of God, we are all brothers and sisters. 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].”⁹ It is no coincidence that President Nelson quotes from the Old Testament in his discussion, since it contains numerous passages dictating how the ancient Israelites were to treat those among and around them. Although the Old Testament is a collection of ancient texts, and while some of its social and cultural assumptions are out-of-date, it remains strikingly relevant in many ways. Its stories, laws, and admonitions had important things to say about how covenant people should interact with others, and many of the challenges the Israelites faced are still with us today. Like President Nelson, we believe the Old Testament still has valuable teachings for us in our day.

We recognize that discussions of economic class, social responsibility, refugee assistance, gender equality, and social justice can be sensitive and that many of these issues, including even the vocabulary used to describe them, have become politically charged. This volume is not intended as policy advocacy, nor is it interested in partisan politics. Rather, our sincere hope is that by better understanding what the word of the Lord has to say about these issues, readers can then continue, in whatever ways they feel are best, to do the hard work of figuring out how to translate scriptural principles to modern, real-world application. Elder Gerrit W. Gong reminds us that it is part

of God's work that we "create lasting justice, equality, fairness, and peace in our homes and communities."¹⁰ We hope that all people can find common ground in these sacred goals, even if they share honest disagreements about the best ways to reach them.

Because this book covers a wide range of topics, we have arranged the chapters thematically. In honor of the fiftieth anniversary of the Sperry Symposium, we begin with a brief historical discussion of the life and contributions of Dr. Sidney B. Sperry. The organization of the remaining papers takes broad inspiration from the Lord's words to Zechariah: "Execute true judgment, and shew mercy and compassions every man to his brother: and oppress not the widow, nor the fatherless, the stranger, nor the poor" (Zechariah 7:9–10). These categories of disadvantaged groups are frequently discussed in Old Testament law, such as in the pairing of "the poor and stranger" (Leviticus 19:10; compare 23:22) or the common triad "the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow" (Deuteronomy 26:12; compare Exodus 22:21–23; Deuteronomy 10:18; 14:29; 16:11; 24:17–21; 27:19). Following an introductory section that presents the doctrines and principles of this topic broadly, we arrange sections with articles discussing Old Testament teachings about women, people who are economically poor and needy, refugees and displaced persons, and individuals with physical disabilities. The book finishes with chapters discussing the teachings of Old Testament prophets as they critiqued the ancient Israelites' performance regarding their responsibility to care for one another.

The authors in this book explore the teachings of the Old Testament from a variety of perspectives. They employ a variety of scholarly tools, and some focus on a specific biblical book while others examine a topic across several Old Testament texts. We would like to thank each of the authors for their hard work and the expertise they bring to their contribution. We also express appreciation for the many people who worked behind the scenes to make this volume possible, including those who reviewed papers. We would like to thank the staff of Religious Education, especially Beverly Yellowhorse and

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We hope that this volume will help you gain a greater appreciation for the Lord’s call (which he has made through prophets both ancient and modern) that we be a people of “one heart and one mind,” who “dwell[l] in righteousness” with “no poor” among us (Moses 7:18).

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Notes

1. Russell M. Nelson, “Let God Prevail,” *Ensign*, November 2020, 94.
2. See Jeffrey R. Holland, “Are We Not All Beggars?,” *Ensign*, November 2014, 40–42; Sharon Eubank, “And the Lord Called His People Zion,” *Ensign*, March 2020, 26–29. In 2009 the Church announced that its three-fold mission would be augmented with a fourth: caring for the poor and needy. See also Scott Taylor, “LDS to Boost Emphasis on Helping the Needy; Salt Lake Temple Not Closing,” *Deseret News*, 11 December 2009, www.deseret.com. The current Church Handbook instructs on the core work of the Church: “Living the gospel of Jesus Christ, caring for those in

- need, inviting all to receive the gospel, and uniting families for eternity” (§0.1).
3. See Gordon B. Hinckley, “The Need for Greater Kindness,” *Ensign*, May 2006, 58; Nelson, “Let God Prevail,” 94; Dallin H. Oaks, “Love Your Enemies,” *Ensign*, November 2020, 28–29; Dallin H. Oaks, “Racism and Other Challenges” (Brigham Young University devotional, 27 October 2020), www.speeches.byu.edu.
 4. See M. Russell Ballard, “The Trek Continues!,” *Ensign*, November 2017, 106; Neil L. Andersen, “The Voice of the Lord,” *Ensign*, November 2017, 124; Jean B. Bingham, “United in Accomplishing God’s Work,” *Ensign*, May 2020, 60–63.
 5. See Ballard, “The Trek Continues!,” 106; Andersen, “Voice of the Lord,” 124; M. Russell Ballard, “Children of Heavenly Father” (Brigham Young University devotional, 3 March 2020), www.speeches.byu.edu.
 6. See M. Russell Ballard, “Doctrine of Inclusion,” *Ensign*, November 2001, 35–38; Ronald A. Rasband, “Faith, Fairness, and Religious Freedom,” *Ensign*, September 2016, 26–33; Dale G. Renlund, “Our Good Shepherd,” *Ensign*, May 2017, 31–32.
 7. See Linda K. Burton, “I Was a Stranger,” *Ensign*, May 2016, 13–15; Patrick Kearon, “Refuge from the Storm,” *Ensign*, May 2016, 111–14; “Losing Everything Twice: President Uchtdorf’s Refugee Experience,” *Church News*, 5 May 2016, www.churchofjesuschrist.org.
 8. Dale G. Renlund, “Infuriating Unfairness,” *Liahona*, May 2021, XXX.
 9. Russell M. Nelson, “The Second Great Commandment,” *Ensign*, November 2019, 98.
 10. Gerrit W. Gong, “All Nations, Kindreds, and Tongues,” *Ensign*, November 2020, 40.