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**Abstract** Introduction to this special issue of Sidney B. Sperry's Book of Mormon writings.

## Editor's Introduction

Stephen D. Ricks

Our purpose in featuring the Book of Mormon writings of Sidney B. Sperry in this special issue is to make accessible many of his essays that are out of print or are not readily available. This year marks the hundredth anniversary of the birth of Sidney Sperry, an individual who did much ground-breaking work in the study of the scriptures, particularly the Book of Mormon, from the 1930s to the 1970s. Over the past decade FARMS has made available a selection of Sperry's essays as reprints or typescripts—with this issue, we have standardized the format of those selections and made them available in one volume.

Although Book of Mormon research has progressed beyond the pioneering explorations and views of Dr. Sperry, his works deserve attention. They identified issues and proposed solutions that still remain stimulating to Book of Mormon scholars. We make no effort here to evaluate, critique, or update Sperry's discussions, but trust that serious students will benefit by having his writings conveniently available.

In this issue, several chapters from Sperry's 1947 *Our Book of Mormon* have been included. The beginning chapters in this work discuss the contents of each book in the Book of Mormon in basic outline form. Sperry next deals with the Book of Mormon as literature—he includes the Book of Mormon in his definition of great literature—and cites examples and provides parallels of six-

teen different types of literature found in the Book of Mormon: gospel, epistle, psalm, lamentation, historical narrative, memoir, prophetic discourse, oratory, patriarchal blessing, symbolic prophecy, prophetic narrative, prophetic dialogue, allegory, prayer, song, and genealogy. Sperry treats literary problems that the Book of Mormon sheds light on—the authorship of the Pentateuch and Isaiah, as well as issues surrounding the Book of Mormon use of the Sermon on the Mount and various New Testament scriptures. He further expands on textual criticism as it relates to the Book of Mormon and to the brass plates.

Sperry's 1970 *Book of Mormon Compendium*, though currently out of print, remains accessible to the serious Book of Mormon student and has therefore, with few exceptions, not been included in this issue. In this standard commentary, Sperry provides a description of the contents and an analysis of each book in the Book of Mormon. He retells the narrative and deals with some important issues—the use of the Urim and Thummim, linguistic aspects of the plates, the title page, the Three and Eight Witnesses, the nature of the Church in the Book of Mormon, the properties of God, the relationship of humankind with God, death and the afterlife, and the "Isaiah problem" (was there more than one author of Isaiah?). Three themes that he terms "outstanding messages" of the Book of Mormon are a warning of impending destruction, a testimony that Jesus is the Christ, and the destiny of the remnant of the house of Israel. Those articles appearing in this issue from the *Compendium* include "The 'Isaiah Problem' in the Book of Mormon" and "Some Universals in the Book of Mormon" (both were originally published in *Our Book of Mormon*). They have been included because they appeared numerous times in his publications. Dr. Sperry must have felt strongly about their message to have repeated them so frequently.

While many parts of the *Compendium* are fairly basic, Sperry does provide good seminal thoughts on a variety of issues. In preparing his *Compendium*, Sperry has applied common sense; consulted Church history documents, the Bible, and the Doctrine and Covenants; made occasional reference to non-Mormon scholars, such as C. C. Torrey and S. R. Driver; and drawn comparisons between passages in the Book of Mormon, the King James Version of the Bible, and the Septuagint.

In the additional articles in this issue that follow the chapters from *Our Book of Mormon*. Sperry examines remnants of Hebrew idioms and structure found in the Book of Mormon and staunchly maintains that it was translated from an ancient document. Sperry presents a number of “universals” he finds within the Book of Mormon, explores the composition of Lehi’s family, describes the Book of Mormon message on brotherhood, clarifies the term *Lamanite*, and recounts the last years of Moroni’s life, during which he wrote the title page of the Book of Mormon. In addition, Sperry touches on the still-debated issue of the existence of one or two Cumorahs. Our selection of articles has been rounded out by the inclusion of Sperry’s discussion on the selection of scriptures quoted by Moroni to Joseph Smith on the evening of 21 September 1823. Three of the articles—“The Isaiah Quotation: 2 Nephi 12–24,” “Were There Two Cumorahs,” and “Moroni Expounds Old Testament Scriptures”—have never previously appeared in a formal publication.

If items have been previously published, we have left the text basically intact with some minor changes: (1) Where Sperry referred to himself in the third person as “the author,” we have changed that to more modern usage in the first person; (2) where Sperry included some bibliographic references within the text, we have moved those to footnotes; (3) where Sperry referred to the number of pages in a given section of the Book of Mormon, we have updated that to correspond to our 1981 edition; (4) a few words or phrases have been changed to correspond to modern usage; and (5) we have written and included abstracts and sub-headings that did not appear in Sperry’s original writings. Many of Sperry’s sources are dated at this point in time, but every effort has been made to provide full bibliographic information for all of his references in case readers wish to locate those sources.

We have tried to provide a comprehensive bibliography of Sidney Sperry’s writings, something which has not been previously available. Because of our emphasis on the Book of Mormon, we have also provided chapter titles for those of his volumes that deal specifically with the Book of Mormon.

A number of individuals have aided in the success of this volume and deserve our rich thanks. Steven Booras and Rebecca Kint scanned in some of the articles. John W. Welch has provided

direction to this issue, and Melvin J. Thorne has furnished able editorial support. Daniel B. McKinlay prepared most of the bibliography and performed other research tasks. Michael Lyon was instrumental in obtaining and preparing the photographs included. Carma and Richard Anderson, A. Burt Horsley, Keith Meservy, Hugh Nibley, Robert Patch, Ellis Rasmussen, and David Yarn have added personal insights into the character and background of Sidney Sperry. We are pleased that the efforts of so many individuals have resulted in an issue that honors Sidney B. Sperry and his contributions to the scholarly study of the Book of Mormon.