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Abstract Personal reminiscences about Sidney B. Sperry.



Ellis Rasmussen, Sidney Sperry, and Keith Meservy
examining characters relating
to the Dead Sea Scrolls
1959

Sidney B. Sperry, As I Remember and Appreciate Him

Ellis T. Rasmussen

The last books I have from Dr. Sperry, given and inscribed by him in April and November of 1970, address me as his “beloved friend and colleague, with compliments and best wishes.” He has been a friend to me from the beginning of our association and helped me to become a colleague.

The first contacts I had with Dr. Sperry came at Brigham Young University during 1941. I was twenty-five years of age, single, just home from a mission in Germany and our own Southern states (the German missions were closed at the onset of the war). He seemed to take a personal interest in me not only because we shared an affection for the South but also because he seemed to think I had some potential he could help develop.

I finished my bachelor’s degree that same summer and went to work in the fall of 1941 in the LDS Church Education System, opening up an experimental half-time seminary in a small high school in Weston, Idaho—teaching three classes in seminary and three in the high school. Dr. Sperry had been a pioneer in CES and thought I made a good choice in seeking employment there.

Each summer from then until 1949 I returned to Brigham Young University, undertaking graduate work under Dr. Sperry’s guidance. He, having begun his biblical language studies in graduate school in Chicago in a field totally different from his undergraduate major, didn’t hesitate to recommend that I, belatedly, get into Old Testament languages and literature. “Scholars

in the Church haven't paid enough attention to Hebrew since the time of the Prophet Joseph," he said.

By the fall of 1949 he had made arrangements enabling me to come and teach part time at Brigham Young University and undertake graduate work in earnest. So my wife, our small family, and I bought a small new home in Orem. Within two more years I had my master's degree and, thanks to Dr. Sperry, an opportunity to teach full time at Brigham Young University, starting in 1951.

It didn't stop there, however. In 1955 I was looking for schools in the East where I might further pursue biblical languages and literature. I chose a somewhat obscure graduate school in Philadelphia, and my old mentor encouraged me therein because he recognized the names and works of some of the faculty there. My growing family and I moved to a suburb of Philadelphia in 1957-58, with the help of a modest sabbatical leave grant, aided by a little cost-of-living supplement arranged by someone who remains unidentified.

I remember with pleasure many facets of my association with Sidney B. Sperry. One day I volunteered in class a possible cognate for one of the Hebrew words for "seer"; though he perceived what I was suggesting, he explained it to the class, assuming they might not see it. One morning I came into his office and upon inquiring about his health received the jolly response, "Oh, I'm all right, so far as I am translated correctly!" I treasured his appreciation of the Church, its music, and its programs; I still turn occasionally to find again some item of interest and value I remember in his early MIA course of study (for 1938-39), entitled *Ancient Records Testify in Papyrus and Stone*. I admire the fact that his early interest in biblical languages and literature led him not only into deep insights in the Old Testament, but also into a deep commitment to and understanding and firm testimony of all of our standard works. I admired his familiar and friendly association with several of our General Authorities. I own and use a dozen of the books he authored concerning our several books of scripture.

Sidney B. Sperry has been and remains in my memory affectionately "my old mentor, and friend."