

INTRODUCTION

For more than four decades S. Kent Brown has been a welcome presence on the Provo, Utah, campus of Brigham Young University (BYU), first as a student for a brief period and then as a teacher. As a professor of ancient scripture and Near Eastern studies he has devoted his academic life to expanding the borders of our knowledge about the history and religions of the Fertile Crescent and helping others to understand that part of the world. It is no exaggeration to say that thousands of students have benefited from his knowledge, wisdom, and kindness. Professor Brown is truly a gentleman and a scholar, a shrinking set in the world of academe today. Many on the BYU campus have known him not only as a teacher, but also as a constant and steady mentor and friend. Several others beyond Provo and even the United States have been privileged to call him a colleague and comrade in the common cause of lifting and building the world through careful and articulate scholarship. Truly, his reach is international.

It came as no surprise, therefore, that several of us wanted to extend our appreciation to him for all he has done by presenting a collection of essays in his honor as he approaches his eighth decade. This volume constitutes that offering. All of the authors are scholars who have had an association with Kent through the years; some were themselves students mentored by him.

The breadth of Kent Brown's expertise is impressive, as the bibliography of his works attests. He is arguably a world expert on early Christian literature and history, especially Coptic Christianity. Yet, the majority of his writings and other creative works

have been geared to helping members of his own confessional affiliation, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, to understand their faith tradition. Thus, Kent is equally at home in the text of the Book of Mormon as he is in the world of the New Testament. Latter-day Saints can be grateful that someone with Kent's discerning eye, scholarly ability, tremendous set of linguistic and historical-critical skills, and his deep commitment to their faith has expended so much careful effort to elucidate the underpinnings of their brand of Christianity.

No less an able administrator than scholar, Kent Brown served well the university community where he made his academic home the last three and a half decades until his retirement in 2009. The leadership positions he has held include department chair of Ancient Scripture, director of BYU's Jerusalem Center for Near Eastern Studies, director of Ancient Studies, and director of the Laura F. Willes Center for Book of Mormon Studies in the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship at BYU. After his "official" retirement, he responded to the university's special request and returned to Jerusalem once again to serve as the Jerusalem Center's academic coordinator and associate director. Kent has always taken very seriously the ideal of a consecrated life—giving back to the university his time, talents, and resources without expectation of reward. All who know him regard Kent Brown as a consensus builder and leader by example.

For years Kent served as editor of the Maxwell Institute's *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*. He has corresponded with a wide variety of authors and writers, mature scholars to beginning students, professionals to laypersons. They and the journal are better because of his editorial oversight.

Kent Brown was also among the first of his colleagues at the Maxwell Institute to appreciate the power of visual media to illuminate and instruct a new generation of learners raised in the digital world. He conceived, cowrote, and coproduced four documentary films, two of which have helped to change the way Latter-day Saints

understand Book of Mormon geography in an ancient setting. For all of his work on the text and history of the Book of Mormon, he still regards it as one of the most fruitful arenas for the LDS scholar. The *Golden Road*, a documentary on the fabled incense trail that ran from southern Arabia to the Mediterranean, has been warmly received by those in modern Middle Eastern countries associated with the ancient trade route.

All of the foregoing helps to explain the eclectic contents of the present volume. Kent Brown has touched upon so many topics associated with the ancient Near East, and become a valued colleague of such a diverse group of scholars, that the essays in this volume are something of a capsulized summary of his career and interests. These essays, however, reflect only a small number of the scholars who have come within Kent's orbit of influence and have desired to honor him. Many more, while wanting to recognize his achievements, were prevented from submitting formal papers for a variety of understandable reasons. However, the spirit of their well-wishes also accompanies this volume, which we have entitled *Bountiful Harvest* to reflect both the richness of Kent's career and the abundance of our esteem for him.

We extend our deep appreciation to the dedicated production staff who have contributed so much labor and talent to this volume. Shirley S. Ricks (production editor) and Elin Roberts (office manager) have been indispensable fellow laborers throughout. Our thanks likewise to Alison V. P. Coutts (typesetting, indexing); Paula W. Hicken and Sandra A. Thorne (proofreading); Rebekah Atkin, Julie Davis, and Daniel B. McKinlay (source checking); and Stetson Robinson (indexing). These and other staff at the Maxwell Institute have all labored generously and cheerfully on this project, as an expression of collegial affection.

All of us extend to our friend, S. Kent Brown, heartfelt congratulations on a life well lived and a career well blessed, and hope for him continued happiness and success. Those of us who know Kent

well also wish health and long life to the secret behind his accomplishments—his eternal companion Gayle. Together they epitomize the Lord’s promise: “Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again” (Luke 6:38).

Andrew C. Skinner

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