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Responding to a Non- Responsive Response

Brant A. Gardner

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Responding to a Non-Responsive Response

Brant A. Gardner

Abstract: *James Lucas had the opportunity to respond to the review of the book that he and Jonathan Neville wrote, *By Means of the Urim & Thummim*. He elected not to really respond to the issues I brought up but rather summarized his essential points. That doesn't leave much to respond to. However, there is a continuing misunderstanding of how historians work that I feel must be underscored.*

In an earlier volume of *Interpreter*, Jeff Lindsay and I provided independent reviews of *By Means of the Urim & Thummim: Restoring Translation to the Restoration*, a book by James Lucas and Jonathan Neville.¹ In response to that review, Lucas notes the following:

I appreciate the *Interpreter*'s editors' willingness to allow me to: (1) succinctly summarize the book's argument since readers would not be able to garner that from these reviews, and (2) lay out how going forward we might better construct a faithful narrative of the Book of Mormon's production. (My

1. See Brant A. Gardner, "Trust Us, We're Lawyers: Lucas and Neville on the Translation of the Book of Mormon," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 63 (2025), 135–68, journal.interpreterfoundation.org/trust-us-were-lawyers-lucas-and-neville-on-the-translation-of-the-book-of-mormon/; and Jeff Lindsay, "Through a Glass Darkly: Restoring Translation to the Restoration?," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 63 (2025), 169–202, journal.interpreterfoundation.org/through-a-glass-darkly-restoring-translation-to-the-restoration/. For the book that Lindsay and I reviewed, see James W. Lucas and Jonathan E. Neville, *By Means of the Urim & Thummim: Restoring Translation to the Restoration* (Cottonwood Heights, UT: Digital Legend Press & Publishing, 2023).

co-author and I have posted a detailed commentary on the reviews elsewhere.)²

Clearly, the purpose of the piece provided as a response to the reviews in *Interpreter* is not to respond to the reviews, so I don't have much to respond to in this rejoinder. I will simply state that my objections to the positions presented in *By Means of the Urim & Thummim* are not resolved (and not really addressed) by Lucas's response.

I must highlight one aspect of his book summary. Lucas perpetuates the fundamental argument of the book, which is that the term "Urim and Thummim" *must* refer *exclusively* to the interpreters. I need to emphasize that "Urim and Thummim" is not a Book of Mormon term; it appears nowhere in the volume. It is borrowed from the Bible and was, after the translation of the Book of Mormon, applied to the instruments used in that translation. Further, the biblical Urim and Thummim had no known use as an instrument of translation.

Lucas and Neville are correct that "Urim and Thummim" *could* refer to the interpreters; no scholar denies this. The evidence demonstrates that the term was used much more broadly. There are historical statements where the label "Urim and Thummim" is clearly used to describe a seer stone. There are zero historical statements that suggest that it *exclusively* referred to the interpreters. Scholars who point this out are not calling Joseph or Oliver dishonest as Lucas and Neville assert.

Perhaps a few more modern parallels will help make the issue clear. "Levis" can refer to the product from the Levi Strauss brand. However, it is also commonly used to reference other kinds of denim jeans. "Kleenex" certainly can refer to a specific brand of tissue, but common usage often has "Kleenex" meaning brands of tissues offered by other vendors. "Xerox," as a verb, has come to be synonymous with photocopying, regardless of who manufactures the photocopy machine. "Coke" is a well-known brand, of course, yet in many southern states it is also a generic term for any carbonated drink.

"Urim and Thummim" had a similar range of usage. If I ask someone in the south if they had a Coke earlier in the day, and they say yes, does that necessarily mean they drank Coca-Cola? No. Could it? Yes. Basing a book on the idea that the response could *only* mean

2. James W. Lucas, "Joseph and Oliver Told the Truth about the Translation: A Response to Brant Gardner's and Jeff Lindsay's Reviews," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Faith and Scholarship* 64 (2025), 81–98, journal.interpreterfoundation.org/joseph-and-oliver-told-the-truth-about-the-translation-a-response-to-brant-gardners-and-jeff-lindsays-reviews/.

Coca-Cola would be folly. It is likewise folly to insist that "Urim and Thummim" must *only* refer to the interpreters.

I hope that the continued employment of this fallacy by Lucas and Neville results from their misunderstanding and not an intentional misrepresentation. Either way, the understanding of their readers is not enlarged.



Brant A. Gardner *did his undergraduate work at Brigham Young University. He received a Master's in Anthropology from the State University of New York at Albany, specializing in Mesoamerican ethnohistory. He is an executive editor for Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship. He is the author of the six-volume Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon, as well as Traditions of the Fathers: The Book of Mormon As History and The Gift and Power: Translating the Book of Mormon. His most recent books are Engraven Upon Plates, Printed Upon Paper: Textual and Narrative Structures of the Book of Mormon and The Plates of Mormon: A Book of Mormon Study Edition Based on Textual and Narrative Structures in the English Translation, each published by Kofford Books. Gardner has also contributed a Book of Mormon Minute to the ScripturePlus app, a condensed commentary on two or three verses at a time from the Book of Mormon.*

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