

## A Rev! Interview With James Garlow

In response to *The Da Vinci Code*, James Garlow has written two books: *Cracking Da Vinci's Code: You've Read the Fiction, Now Read the Facts* (with co-author Peter Jones) and *The Da Vinci Codebreaker: An Easy-to-Use Fact Checker* (with co-author Timothy Paul Jones). Garlow holds an M.Div. from Asbury Theological Seminary, a Th.M. from Princeton Theological Seminary, and a Ph.D. in Historical Theology from Drew University. He recently talked to Rev! about how churches can respond effectively to *The Da Vinci Code* movie.

Rev!: Your book *Cracking Da Vinci's Code* sold 350,000 copies. Why did you see the need to write another one?

**Garlow:** I really wanted to have a substantial glossary in the back of my first book, but time and space just weren't there. So this second book, *The Da Vinci Code Breaker*, defines over 500 terms in *The Da Vinci Code*. When you're reading the book or watching the movie, you can just look up a term in my dictionary and find out what it is, and I also include terms

and concepts that Dan Brown *should have* included. So it goes well beyond just *The Da Vinci Code* itself and helps people understand the authenticity of the Scriptures and issues of the divinity of Christ.

**Rev!:** Why should pastors be interested in the release of the movie and the whole cultural interest in *The Da Vinci Code*?

**Garlow:** Two factors—one is defensive and one is offensive. Defensively there are substantial numbers of persons who bought into the book as accurate when it came out. When I do book signings, I'm consistently running into people who say, "Please make this out to my nephew Dave." Then they lean close, as if they're kind of embarrassed, as if they're the only ones telling me this—"He read *The Da Vinci Code*; he believes it and trashed his Christian faith over it." I hear that in *enormous* numbers.

I encountered that a great deal...people cannot sort out the fact from the fiction in the book. There's a little bit of fact and a truckload of fiction, but Dan Brown has mixed the two together...he could have simply said, "This stuff is not true. This is a novel. Get over it; don't take it seriously." But he went exactly in the opposite direction in his interviews saying, "I

stand behind everything I've written." He's been scalded for that by both the conservatives and the liberals—so that's the defensive posture.

Offensively, I think the church has been given this *powerful* opportunity, a *spectacular* open window for a season. The first open window was when the book came out. The second one now is the movie. This is going to be a blockbuster. This is going to be *huge*. It's going to be an enormously successful movie, and I encourage people...number one, read the book. I tell people jokingly—borrow his book, but buy mine and be equipped on these issues.

But I encourage churches to go to the movie. Now I don't know what the movie is going to have in it, so I'm not sure what age to say because if it has some of the more sexual explicit stuff—I just don't know what it's going to do with that topic, so we have to sort that out yet. I do not encourage Christians to stay away from the movie. I encourage them to host Da Vinci Code parties. We're gearing up in our church to train the entire church to get their friends to the movie and equip them on the six key issues that are pertinent—theologically and biblically—and to give *enormous* evangelistic hope.

I graduated from seminary many, many years ago and did my doctorate after that, and through the years nobody has ever come to me and asked me to explain to them the divinity of Christ; almost nobody ever comes and asks any question about the authenticity and reliability of the New Testament. But thanks to Dan Brown, people are asking that. It opens the doors...That's what Dan Brown has done. He has opened the door for us to so many people...There's a right way to be defensive. But then there's the right way to turn the guns and go forward offensively, and I want to encourage churches and pastors.

I spoke on this topic last week in Denver. I asked, "How many of you read *The Da Vinci Code*?" Very few hands go up—and that's like sending missionaries to some nation in Africa and telling them they don't have to learn the language of that nation. We really need to equip our people to speak the language—and for a stretch here it's going to be *The Da Vinci Code* again...I want people to read it, know about it. It gives an incredible opportunity to shore up people's belief systems because they aren't to be afraid of this stuff—they can learn to give an answer for the hope that lies within them. We have just a fabulous opportunity coming.

**Rev!:** Can you give us a brief overview of those six points you referred to?

**Garlow:** I will just list them. The first two are less important ones:

1. Dan Brown's understanding of the church's view of sexual expression, sexuality.
2. Dan Brown's understanding of the church's view of women.

His whole understanding of the nature of the church, the definition of the church. He doesn't grasp that. Now getting to stronger ones—the next three are *extremely* important.

3. The issue of the life of Jesus
4. The issue of the divinity of Christ.
5. The issue of the reliability and authenticity of the New Testament.

Now we're up to number 6, the biggest and most important—the epicenter of the book.

6. The whole definition of God—the understanding of God.

In other words, on this last point, it's clear that Dan Brown wrote a propaganda piece. This is a book with an agenda. My co-author Peter Jones is a brilliant scholar. He saw this way before I did because he's been in the area in terms of scholarship on understanding paganism, and he grasped it right away. I didn't see it, and I thought it was a kind of well-spun novel initially. It is a page-turner—the book is fun to read, exciting to read. I don't know how to judge novels. I don't read enough novels, and I'm not skilled in that area. But as for *me*, it was a fun read as a novel—it held my attention. I read right through to 5 a.m. My co-author Peter Jones is the one who made the case to me, and I began to see what he was saying. It's very agenda-driven. This wasn't to be just a nice, cool novel. This is written with a *particular* viewpoint in mind, and that key issue is who is God? What is God—the definition of God—and that comes through the pages pretty strongly.

**Rev!:** Can you give us a tour through each of those issues?

**Garlow:** The first one having to do with a view of sexuality—he says the church demonized sex. In contrast to that, the biblical understanding of sex is one of pristine beauty and affirmation within the covenant of

marriage. God is the creator of sex. In fact there's a fun quote I like to give—"Sex is God's idea and second to salvation is the best idea he ever had." Where Dan Brown is correct on this is some of the early church fathers wrote very disparagingly about sex, even about sexual expression within marriage. So in that one sense he's correct. However, in terms of the biblical understanding, God's understanding of it, and the overall church's understanding of it historically—it has sacredness, in terms of its expression within marriage.

2. His view of women is that the church led a smear campaign against Mary Magdalene as a way of putting down women because Mary Magdalene was Jesus' designate to be the leader of the church once he had passed on—not Peter, James, John, etc. This is historically invalid by virtue of the fact that it was Pope Gregory the Great in the year 590 who equated Mary Magdalene—who is of course set free from the demons, the devils that were within her, in a New Testament text—with an unnamed person in an adjacent text who was a prostitute. This wasn't a smear campaign—it was merely sloppy scholarship. That story stayed, unfortunately. It took center stage, and the two were equated all along. Mary Magdalene comes from Magdala, which as a town was associated

with prostitution, so that may have contributed to the error. There's no evidence in the New Testament that she was a prostitute. Nor is there a shred of evidence that the church was trying to lead a campaign against women and thus created this line.

Nor did the church engage itself in killing 5 million women in what may be called gendercide—the killings that took place between 1400 and 1700, approximately, were primarily carried out by the state, and it was more like 100 thousand not 5 million. It would have depopulated Europe had he been accurate.

So he's dead wrong...He shows no understanding of the Bible's position—Esther and Deborah and the view of women throughout the Old Testament, the Proverbs 31 woman, as well as the way women are lifted up in the New Testament in multiple places. He's correct that some of the early church fathers did, however, make statements that were simply unbiblical, and they were put-downs of females. So he's accurate that some of the early church fathers did make some of those statements, but within the Bible or the scope of church history we don't find that.

3. Definition of church—he doesn't understand that in 380 when Christianity became the official established religion of the Roman Empire, it created a problem we have dealt with to this day—people who are Christians in name only who had to declare themselves to be Christian just by virtue of living in the Roman Empire, much as Americans see themselves as Christian. He doesn't grasp the difference between (1) people who simply call themselves Christian—institutional, organized Christianity...and (2) the authentic body of Christ as followers of Jesus. He doesn't grasp the differences between those, so he throws the baby out with the bath water. If he sees something as institutionally wrong, he assumes that means that Christianity as a concept or the true church as a concept is simply invalid. He does put Protestants in the unusual position that we find ourselves having to defend Roman Catholicism. He makes claims that the Vatican did this or that, but he's so historically off—he's saying that about certain years when the Vatican didn't even exist...when the Vatican, at that time, location, was merely a cemetery on the top of a hill, and that was it. There was no awareness. His trashing of the Roman Catholic Church is so unfair.

4. Issue of the life of Christ—he makes a case that at the Council of Nicaea, year 325, Constantine coerced these guys to vote that Jesus was divine, and it passed by only a close vote. In reality it passed by a vote of 316 to 2, which isn't close by any standard, but on top of that, more important than that, they didn't vote that Jesus was divine—they only affirmed that which Christians had been dying for...for a couple hundred years. So there was no vote to declare something—it was a vote to affirm a position that was already engrained in the scope of Christianity. What was amazing about the 316 to 2 vote is that many of them came from where Arius came from—Arius is the one who caused the whole controversy. Constantine didn't do it to coerce them to vote Jesus divine—he called them together because Christianity was showing some signs of splitting and was growing very rapidly and would create political headaches for him. He wasn't sure how to deal with them because paganism was eclipsing Christianity. So with Arius making the claim he did about Jesus having been created and not being co-eternal with the Father, the result was a controversy within Christianity. And many of the bishops came from Arius' area, and they expected them to side with Arius, and the fact is the final vote was 316 to 2 on this issue of

affirming the historic position that had been there all along—that Jesus was divine.

5. The issue of Jesus marriage—there’s not one shred of evidence that Jesus cohabitated with Mary. The text Brown draws from is the Gospel of Philip, which was written in 250 AD, and he makes a big claim that Jesus was a companion of Mary, and by virtue of being a companion, he makes the jump to sexual partner. By sexual partner he means married and makes the claim that Jesus could not have been single because that wouldn’t have been back then—but the Dead Sea Scrolls indicate that the Essenes did exactly that, they were celibate. He also says that the Dead Sea Scrolls were a part of the Nag Hammadi discoveries—those are two completely different discoveries, and he says they both shed early light on Christianity, when in fact the Dead Sea Scrolls say nothing about Christianity—they’re strictly about Judaism, and they relate to the Old Testament. That’s one of his many errors. Dead Sea Scrolls, 1947; Nag Hammadi, 1945, being discovered in a town in Egypt...So many, many errors he has even about that. The Gospel of Philip—he makes a claim that it says Jesus kissed Mary on the lips and favored her above everybody else. It actually says, “Jesus kissed her on...” and at that point

the fragment is torn, and you can't tell what word was there...The word "lips" doesn't appear—editors supplied that. Could have kissed her on the forehead or even the cheek or something. Seems to have the same meaning as the way we're instructed to greet one another in the New Testament—greeting each other with a brotherly kiss. It has that kind of fellowship or liturgical meaning. In addition to that, the Gospel of Philip, which he relies on in the Nag Hammadi discovery, is rather anti-marriage. So for it to be making the case that Jesus was married is a bizarre claim on his part—it just isn't there.

5. The authenticity of the New Testament—on that particular issue he claims that Constantine instituted the Council of Nicaea in the year 325; that part is accurate, but for the purpose—this gets very amazing. This is where he gets into real hocus-pocus thinking—for the purpose of removing all the original books of the Bible and doing a quick switch and substituting Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, which is really bizarre.

What's bizarre about that is Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John appear to be written before 70 AD by virtue of them not referring to the destruction of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple. Jerusalem and the temple—being the epicenter of so many stories—would be referenced in

some way had they been writing after 70 AD, but it's not in there, so consequently those come before 70 AD. The Nag Hammadi text, 52 of them— almost all—are written in the 2nd and 3rd centuries—much, much later. The Nag Hammadi texts cover a big scattering of topics. They aren't even unified. They're Gnostic texts...some of them being quasi-Christian, all the way to being blatantly pagan, very anti-scriptural—a lot of variety among them. Here's what's bizarre—the chronology is historically impossible for the claim that Dan Brown makes. Here's why I say that. The first statement of the gospels is written by Paul in the 50s, where in 1 Corinthians 15 he says the gospel is this: Jesus is crucified and resurrected on the third day. Liberal and conservative scholars all agree that was in the 50s. Paul goes on to say—liberals and conservatives both agree that Paul is writing in those years about two decades after Jesus ascended into heaven—he learned about Jesus. He learned about the gospels from Jesus' contemporaries. Paul was actually a contemporary of Jesus, but of course didn't embrace him during Jesus' earthly lifetime. So he says he learned this from the actual followers of Jesus and *names* them. Now if there had been other books or other Christianities, as Dan Brown likes to claim, and he's quoting from people like Elaine Pagels, the Harvard graduate who wrote the book *The Gnostic Gospels* as a scholarly

work—she was one of the translators of the Nag Hammadi text—if there had been all these other books first, had there been a great switch, it had to occur between the resurrection of Jesus and Paul’s writing in early 50s, in that 20-year span. So somehow Paul would have had some knowledge at some point of it and made reference to at least one of these, and he would have made reference to some kind of a controversy; at least he would be referring to these other books. The fact is this so-called switch doesn’t occur until the year 325, according to Dan Brown. The Council of Nicaea never dealt with canonicity issues at all. Never dealt with the books of the New Testament, that wasn’t the focus. The divinity of Christ *was*...but never the issue of what was in or not in the New Testament. So there is simply zero historical evidence to back up this most bizarre theory. If Dan Brown would have simply said, “It’s a novel. I made this stuff up,” then everybody would have chilled, but the fact is he kept claiming this was all for real.

6. The whole definition of God—the understanding of God. This is the most critical one. Dan Brown’s understanding of God is classically portrayed in Romans 1, where it says you will worship the Creator or you will worship the creation. The view is worshipping the Creator or the

creation. In the Scripture we're taught there's a God who is beyond us, a transcendent God, meaning, of course, beyond and above us, separate from us with his own personality. Contrast to that, Dan Brown—this is where I was slow and sluggish to see this. Dan Brown embraces classical paganism. Classical paganism really depends on the view that God is the force of nature itself, and Dan Brown epitomizes that by his emphasis upon the womb of Mary and by extension, Mary Magdalene herself. The womb being focused on because the procreational capacity of nature, its ability to sustain itself, gives it what Dan Brown feels is deific proportions. Therefore it becomes a form of pantheism. If you're going to find God, you look within yourself. The book ends with that bizarre account of him thinking he hears the voice of Mary Magdalene calling from below the Louvre in Paris. It's less about Mary Magdalene as a human being than it is about the whole issue of nature worship. That's a clear agenda piece for paganism, which is frankly on quite a rise in Western countries and the United States as well.

So that's a quick overview.

Rev!: That's a lot of history, Jim! Of course, you have a Ph.D. in church history.

**Garlow:** That I do. I want pastors and lay people, though, to see this as a tremendous opportunity. When average laypeople walk through these six things, they're initially intimidated, but if they'll read through our book the second time, then the intimidation begins to give way to "Oh, yeah, I remember this; I'm starting to recognize this."

This is actually not rocket science—it's basic historical truth, and it's very teachable to people. This can be learned; they don't have to have a seminary degree. The average person they're going to be talking to has no knowledge about this either. They're going to be two or three steps *well* ahead of them and can clearly refute the principles of *The Da Vinci Code* if they're dealing with a person who has a truly open mind on these issues.

I want to encourage people—when they hear these terms and can't remember, then they can go directly to my dictionary. The first book, *Cracking Da Vinci's Code* outlines these six areas, but then the dictionary

is a backup tool to go to anytime they forget what a word means or when conversation arises about a term. We have charts and diagrams in there to help. For example, a chart that I think is going to be extremely helpful to people is a listing of all the books that made it into the New Testament—Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, etc.—but then all the charts of the books that were Christian writings but didn't make it in...then the ones that were the pseudepigrapha, and we explain that one...then the basic writings that are distinctly Gnostic during this same time. We make columns and charts, so you go, "Oh, so that's what that book means. Okay, now I understand where that fits in the scheme of things."

We include descriptions of all these, so it goes well beyond just *The Da Vinci Code*. It helps them understand the authenticity of their Bible as well. It's that kind of a dictionary that will have value to them long after Da Vinci is forgotten. Leonardo Da Vinci didn't have a code. This is Dan Brown's code.