

# Saints and sinners: Dealing with a possible end

Hitting the road may take the place of digging a fallout shelter if terrorists should strike again in this country.

A recent Washington Post story told how some Washingtonians are preparing to evacuate the capital in the event of an attack. A female lawyer has directions to a friend's cabin in her purse and keeps a backpack and cat carrier by the front door.

In a bag stowed in her car, a financial consultant has packed jeans, a sweatshirt, aspirin, antacids, water and paper matches. Her evacuation route: she will drive south to her family's house two hours away in Virginia.

A caterer plans to meet his friend at New York Avenue and Blandensburg Road. If that rendezvous fails to come off, they will meet outside the National Aquarium in Baltimore.

District of Columbia officials have printed

directions on how to stock "Emergency Go" kits. A three-day supply of water and a compass are among the items recommended.

These preparations are reminiscent of the Cuban missile crisis of the 1960s, when Americans dug fallout shelters and stocked them with provisions — and sometimes a gun to keep out interlopers — in the event of an atomic air raid.

But probably nothing that has upset our world in the last 50 years can compare with the fright that consumed a large portion of the population in 1910, before anyone had ever heard of the atom bomb or Osama bin Laden.

For many months, professors, tycoons, statesmen, actors and farmers made frantic preparations for the world's end. Newspapers published lurid accounts of what was in store for the earth's inhabitants because the dreaded Halley's comet was coming. All scores had to



## george plagenz

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be settled and moral debts paid before a deadly gas devastated the whole world. There were dozens of suicides daily.

Writers for the Sunday supplements — fore-runners of the supermarket tabloids — had a field day. A yellowed clipping for a 1956 magazine tells the amazing story.

"The dynamite that rocked the world was set off by a German scientist who announced he had located Halley's comet. He said it would brush near the Earth on the night of May 18, 1910."

Well, Halley's comet made a visit every 76 years, didn't it? The world hadn't blown up before.

"Yes, but this time it would be different," said the scientist. The comet's fiery tail would brush across the face of the Earth, leaving death and destruction in its wake.

Then another astronomer proclaimed that his spectroscopic examination showed that the comet's tail was filled with cyanogens, a poisonous gas that was deadly if inhaled and inflammable to boot.

There was drinking and carousing. People wanted to have a good time in their final hours. Some French author didn't help matters when he announced, "The fumes which will sweep the Earth will be of the laughing-gas variety. The end will not be painful. All of us will be choked with merriment, laughing hysterically as time

runs out and doom rushes in on all of us."

Then came the day — May 18, 1910. Work stopped in thousands of stores and factories. People thronged the streets, gazing into the sky.

Nothing happened during the day. "Ah, but just wait until tonight," people said. By nightfall, churches and nightclubs were packed.

Then the rumor swept New York that the comet would do no harm to those who stood on bridges over water at the time of the comet's passing. By evening, every bridge was filled with a shoving, screaming crowd of human beings. All through the night millions watched, hushed and frightened. Nothing happened.

Very few even saw the faint trail of the comet. And sheepishly, the people trudged home. Halley's comet had come and gone.

Footnote: When Halley's comet returned on schedule in 1986, scant attention was paid to it.

# The 'VeggieTales' studio takes a \$14-million gamble with its first movie

By Richard N. Ostling

AP Religion Writer

The star is an asparagus. His buddies include a tomato and a cucumber. And they're featured in a movie based on the biblical tale of Jonah, the guy who got swallowed by a whale.

What's the big idea? At Big Idea Productions, it's that kids' entertainment can teach children a thing or two about morality and religious faith yet still trigger a belly laugh or two.

The independent studio from suburban Chicago is about to find out if mainstream moviegoing audiences agree. Its first feature-length film, "Jonah — a VeggieTales Movie," opens Friday.

Big Idea has put \$14 million into the movie, making it a gamble even though the company has sold nearly 30 million of the startlingly successful "VeggieTales" animated videos over the past

nine years.

"Jonah" recycles the biblical book into a fishy story-within-a-story starring Archibald Asparagus (voiced with a British accent by Big Idea founder Phil Vischer) in the title role, alongside Bob the Tomato, Larry the Cucumber and others from Big Idea's improbable garden of animated fruits and vegetables. ("No vegetables were harmed in the making of this film," viewers are assured.)

As with the home videos, Mom, Dad, and other viewers above VeggieTales' target ages of 3-8 will be amused by knowing cultural references: "Jaws" and "Lawrence of Arabia" sneak into the film, as do snack foods, a pop singer, and audiotapes by a motivational speaker ("You are powerful and attractive. You do not run from your problems.")

There are also silly ditties (the best one, "The Credits Song," comes at the end of the credits) and goofy gags. When the prophet Jonah enters town to preach God's law, fast-food stands that offer pork, bats and bugs instantly turn kosher and start selling bagels and coffee.

In this quintessentially Jewish story, the good guy (who was scripted prior to the Sept. 11 attacks) is Khalil, a vaguely Muslim traveling salesman who's half caterpillar, half worm.

Actually, either Muslims or Jews would find VeggieTales productions wholesome rather than troublesome, apart from the studio's Christmas and Easter videos. But Vischer, Big Idea's Iowa-bred founder, is very much a product of white evangelical Protestantism — the Christian and Missionary Alliance, to be specific.

The 36-year-old Vischer says white,

Protestant America has lots of nice, happy people but little great humor. Maybe the people are too comfortable, he muses, admitting that he escaped into humor when his parents divorced. His personal idols became Britain's Monty Python crew and the Coen brothers.

Vischer was tossed out of Minnesota's St. Paul Bible College (now Crown College) for skipping chapel too often, and he started working in video production rather than studying elsewhere.

In 1993, Big Idea produced "Where's God When I'm Scared?" — a pioneering children's video with 3D computer animation. By 1998, Wal-Mart came calling.

College degree or not, Vischer is a philosopher who wrote the 72-page "Big Idea 101" manual for prospective employees. It champions a nonsectarian "biblical worldview," which Vis-

cher defines as hope that results from belief that "there is an Author. We live in a grand story — the triumph of a loving God."

He contrasts that with the "modern worldview" that he thinks was typified by Walt Disney and survives in preschool entertainment. It sees no Author but upholds ideals and another grand story, "the triumph of reason, evolution and the progress of the human spirit."

That's fine as far as it goes, he says, but that culture is fast fading and today's children increasingly consume "postmodern" entertainment that's cynical, bereft of any grand story, hope or ideals. In a word: "whatever."

The married father of three preteens said in a phone interview that, after age 8, what children watch gradually becomes "more disrespectful, sarcastic and cynical."

Not that the big entertainment corporations are immoral "but they're profoundly amoral. They will change values like we change socks," he says. "The problem with amorality in media is, 'Give them what they want.'"

"We are committed to giving kids what they need and making it what they want."

What they need, he insists, is values that will benefit them and society. Each show, he says, should have "a nugget of truth a kid can put in his pocket and carry around the rest of his life."

In Vischer's view, children's entertainment has been — and still is — either "completely earnest" ("Mister Rogers' Neighborhood") or "completely snide and insincere" ("The Beavis & Butt-Head Show"). VeggieTales, he says, falls somewhere in the middle.



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Worship Service: 10 am  
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### Church of the Nazarene

Pastor: Matthew Delp  
Third & Caldwell  
899-2080 or 899-3797

Sunday: Sunday School: 9:45 am  
Worship Service: 10:50 am  
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### First Baptist Church

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Tuesday: Mens' Prayer Group: 6:00 am  
Thursday: Night Bible Study: 7:00 pm

### Seventh Day Adventist Church

1160 Cattletrail  
Pastor: Arlin Cochran • 785-332-2888  
Saturday: Sabbath School: 9:30 am  
Worship Service: 11 am

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Pastor: Loren Strait

Eighth & Arcade • 899-5233  
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Activities: Junior High & High School Youth Groups, Adult Bible Study, Choir, Men's and Women's Groups, Devotions Study, Monthly Fellowship  
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899-3631

Pastor: Rev. Janet Hernandez  
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### Sonrise Christian Church

Ninth & Caldwell • 899-5398  
Minister: Tony Kafka

Youth Minister: Doug Bean  
Sunday: Worship Service: 9:30 am  
Sunday School: 10:45 am  
Wednesday: Junior/Senior High Meeting: 7 pm  
Adult & Children's Classes: 7 pm

### Emmanuel Lutheran Church

13th & Sherman • 899-6161  
Pastor: Scott Grimshaw

Sunday: Sunday School: 8:45 am  
Worship Service: 10 am  
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### Kanorado

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Pastor: Leonard Cox

399-2468  
Sunday: Sunday School: 9 am  
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### Goodland Bible Church

109 Willow Road • 899-6400  
Pastor:

Sunday: Sunday School: 9:45 am  
Morning Worship: 11 am  
Evening Worship: 6 pm  
Wednesday: Call for location

### Grace Fellowship Church

104 E. Hwy 24 • 899-6423  
Pastor: Bob Snyder • Residence: 899-0134

Sunday: Sunday School: 10 am  
Worship Service: 11 am  
Youth Group at Gattshall's at 5:30 pm  
Adult Bible Study 6 pm

### St. Paul's Episcopal Church

13th & Center  
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Priest: Father Charles Schneider  
Deacon: Gretchen Talitha  
Adult Forum: Sunday: 8:30 am  
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1200 15th Street • Burlington, CO • (719) 346-7984  
Sacrament Meeting: 9:30 am  
Sunday School: 10:45 am  
Priesthood/Relief Society: 11:30 am

### Word of Life Foursquare Church

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899-5250

Pastor: John Coumerilh  
Weekend services  
Saturday evening: Worship Celebration & Kids' Church: 6:30 am

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Brewster:

Pastor:  
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Sunday School: 9:45 am CST  
Winona:

Minister: Rev. Bob Winters  
Worship Service: 9 am CST  
Sunday School: 10:15 am CST

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Saturday: 5 am & 6 pm  
Sunday: Sunday School: 10 am

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