

# FamilyLife Today<sup>®</sup> Radio Transcript

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## The Bible—Fun?

Guest: Phil Vischer  
From the series: What's in the Bible? (Day 1 of 2)  
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**Bob:** There is a moral code that goes along with being a follower of Jesus, but Phil Vischer wants to make sure parents know there is a big difference between morality and Christianity.

**Phil:** I am a rule-keeper. I was good at following the rules. My teachers in Sunday school loved me. My AWANA<sup>®</sup> leaders loved me because I could memorize verses so fast. So that was easy! That is not Christianity! That is memorizing things and just being good because, you know, you think you're supposed to. A lot of kids can't even do that, and they feel like failures. Even the ones who can do it—we haven't taught them Christianity. We've taught them to behave like Christians.

**Bob:** This is *FamilyLife Today* for Monday, September 10<sup>th</sup>. Our host is the President of FamilyLife<sup>®</sup>, Dennis Rainey, and I'm Bob Lepine. One of the ways we teach our children the difference between morality and Christianity is by teaching them what's in the Bible. Stay tuned.

**Bob:** And welcome to *FamilyLife Today*. Thanks for joining us. I've decided to start off today with a little Bible quiz for you to see how you're doing. Have you been recently spending any time in the book of Judges?

**Dennis:** I—no, I have not been in Judges.

**Bob:** Okay.

**Dennis:** Well, maybe I have.

**Bob:** If you don't remember, that's not a good sign. [Laughter] Can you name a judge? Name any of the judges for us.

**Dennis:** Well, it'd be good if you told me about this, Bob, in advance.

**Bob:** No, I wanted to put the host on the spot here because—here's why—because we have a guest who's going to help you learn your judges today; okay?

**Dennis:** Really?

**Bob:** Yes.

**Dennis:** Well, Phil Vischer joins us on *FamilyLife Today*. Let's let him do that right here; alright? Phil, welcome back.

**Phil:** Thanks. It's good to be here.

**Dennis:** It's been awhile.

**Phil:** It's only been 14 years. [Laughter] I've almost come up with enough material for another show. [Laughter]

**Dennis:** Phil is the creator of *Veggie Tales*. He now has a new 13-DVD series—

**Phil:** That is correct.

**Dennis:** Now listen carefully to what I'm about to say—the name of it, here—it is *Buck Denver asks*™ ...“*What's in the Bible?*” —not John Denver.

**Phil:** Not John Denver. It's a whole different *Sunshine on My Shoulders* thing. [Laughter] Very different. The irony is, though, that it's full of puppets; and John Denver did a whole album with The Muppets.

**Bob:** Oh!

**Phil:** Do you remember that album?

**Bob:** I do remember that album.

**Phil:** *The John Denver Muppet* album.

**Dennis:** That fits. That fits here; doesn't it?

**Phil:** Well, there's some sort of connection and alignment.

**Dennis:** There is a connection.

He and his wife Lisa have been married for 22 years. They have three children. They live near Chicago. Okay, on with—

**Bob:** The judges! Do you know all of the judges?

**Phil:** If I go through the song, I can tell them. [Laughter]

**Bob:** See, this is how I'm going to help you learn the judges because as a part of *What's in the Bible?*, there's a song about the judges, where you can learn all of them by name.

**Dennis:** Now, see, you have the advantage of having listened—

**Bob:** —to the song.

**Dennis:** —to the song.

**Bob:** —and seen the video.

**Dennis:** Yes.

**Bob:** —but we're going to let you. Are you ready to learn the names of the judges?

**Dennis:** I'm ready. Let's hear it.

**Bob:** All right, here we go.

[Audio Clip]

**Sunday School Lady:** "So that brings us to the seventh book of the Bible and the second historical book: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua—Judges!

**Ian:** Why would they call a book Judges?

**Sunday School Lady:** Because it tells the stories of 12 leaders God used to help Israel. Those leaders were called judges.

[Studio]

**Dennis:** Are both of these voices yours?

**Phil:** Yes, all of the voices are mine.

[Audio Clip]

**Clive:** Do they wear black robes and sit in a courtroom?

**Sunday School Lady:** No, they weren't judges like our judges today. They were really just leaders.

**Buck:** What were their names, Sunday School Lady?

**Sunday School Lady:** Oh, the best way to answer that question is with a song—like this one!

**Emcee:** And now, the Fabulous Bentley Brothers! [Crowd Applause]

[Studio]

**Bob:** These voices are *not* yours.

**Phil:** The following voices will not be mine.

[Audio Clip Summary] The Fabulous Bentley Brothers sing a song about how, before courtroom TV shows of today, God sent judges to Israel. The song explains the title of the book of Judges and names all of the specific judges.

[Studio Laughter]

**Bob:** There you go!

**Phil:** See?!

**Bob:** Now you've got it down; right?

**Dennis:** I—I—no! [Laughter]

**Phil:** So there's a Sunday school teacher in the Chicago area—asked his kids—he was not familiar with the series—asked his kids—I think they were fourth graders—he would give them a piece of candy if anyone could name a judge from the book of Judges. A little girl stood up and named all of the judges in chronological order. He flipped out! “How do you know that?” It was from *What's in the Bible?* She had learned it from that song.

We forget how sticky—pastors do not sing enough! [Laughter] At least, in the white church, pastors do not sing enough because music makes things sticky. I mean, I know the Preamble to the Constitution, not from school—from *Schoolhouse Rock* on Saturday morning cartoons.

**Bob:** There you go!

**Phil:** [Singing] “*We the people, in order to form a more perfect union, establish justice and ensure domestic tranquility—*”

**Bob:** So is *What's in the Bible?* —the biblical *Schoolhouse Rock*?

**Phil:** Yes! It's *Schoolhouse Rock* for Christians. Yes, it's solving a huge problem that we have—that for a couple of generations, we haven't successfully taught the Bible to our kids. Biblical illiteracy is just a *huge* issue.

**Dennis:** Let's talk about that for a moment. Why has that occurred? We have more tools and more resources than ever before, Phil.

**Phil:** We do; we do. I think—if you go back, historically—you go back to the mainline Protestant denominations—and even further back to the Catholic Church—you had Catechism. Every kid had to go through a structured thing that was for the whole church. Every church taught the same stuff to every kid, exactly the same way.

**Bob:** And a lot of it was rote memory. It was boring; and the kids said, "Why am I learning this?"

**Phil:** Yes, yes. As we got more modern, we started throwing that away—especially, as we kind of splintered into a zillion denominations. Then, different denominations would have their own publishing houses and do it their own way. Then, we splintered even more into, "I don't want to be a part of a denomination. We're an independent church. We'll just teach kids our own way." It became so splintered that we really lost an organized way to pass on our faith to our kids. We find it's easier to sell—for example, in a Christian bookstore—a book about helping keep your kids off drugs than about helping your kids learn the Bible.

**Dennis:** You know, I think you're hitting on something here. Parents just need to push back from the radio for a second and go, "This is for me. This is a wake-up call for my spouse and me, as parents, to own the teaching of our children."

**Phil:** Right; right.

**Dennis:** This is not something where you take them to church and you drop them off at Sunday school and let *them* teach your children. This is a responsibility given by God to you, as a parent, when he gave you children.

**Phil:** Right. Sixty-five percent of kids raised in the church today in America stop attending church within two years of graduating from high school. The majority of our kids are walking away from the church. Now, some of them will eventually come back, but many do not. Part of it is that our kids are rejecting what they see today as Christianity. You know, parents haven't learned it either.

There was a megachurch in Dallas that did a survey of its own parents. They said, "Okay, you've got kids in our church. You know what we try to do for your kids on Sunday morning. What do you do for your kids, religiously and spiritually, in the rest of the week?"

Ninety percent of the families, in that really innovative church, had to check the box that said, “Nothing”. Other than a mealtime prayer, there had been no spiritual interaction with their kids. The pastor of that megachurch got up the next Sunday and said, “We are outsourcing everything. You know, we outsource our lawn care. We outsource our laundry. We outsource our cooking, and we are outsourcing the spiritual disciplining of our own children.”

When a kid—Willow Creek did a survey. Of all the kids registered—you know, this is the second biggest church in America—and of all the kids registered in their kids’ program, the average showed up one-and-a-half times a month. That’s an hour-and-a-half or two hours a month that that church got to spend with your kids—whereas, the average American kid spends seven hours a day consuming electronic media. So, 35 hours a week spent with Hollywood and an hour-and-a-half spent at church.

**Dennis:** And you wonder who’s having the biggest impact?

**Phil:** And you wonder why they can’t answer the basic questions. Half of adult Protestants can’t define the word, “grace”, which, Gallup pointed out, was *kind of central* to the Protestant Reformation! [Laughter]

**Dennis:** Kind of!

**Phil:** Yes!

**Dennis:** Let me just read a passage in case a listener is wondering if this is biblical or not. Deuteronomy, Chapter 6, verse 4: “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your might. These words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children.”

**Phil:** You mean Sunday school teachers should? Is that—

**Dennis:** No; it’s to parents.

**Phil:** Ohhhhh!

**Dennis:** It’s calling parents to own this. It goes on to say you should teach these by having puppets on video screens— [Laughter]

**Phil:** And then strapping them to your foreheads; right?

**Dennis:** Yes, yes; right! [Laughter]

**Phil:** It was something like that.

**Dennis:** I mean, the point is you ought to make it a way of life. That's what you've tried to do in this new initiative you're leading; right?

**Phil:** We tend to make—I mean—family devotions for many families are the most awkward 15 minutes of the day—particularly for dads. That just does not come naturally for most dads—to say, “Alright, I'm going to open this book; and I'm going to make my kids—who want to be playing Xbox—sit down and listen to me read. This is so awkward. I can't wait for it to be over. My kids can't wait for it to be over.”

My thought is, “Okay, we all love to sit down and watch a good movie.” We all love to sit down and, if your kids are older, watch *American Idol* or something where everybody gets engaged together. Couldn't learning about the Bible be more like *that*? More like a shared family experience that everyone looks forward to rather than medicine that we can't wait until it's over? No wonder we're not learning—if the experience is unpleasant. That's why—

I started to look back because after *Veggie Tales*—you know, I wrote just about everything in *Veggie Tales* for about ten years and then ended up losing the company in bankruptcy, which is another fun story since I've been here last. Suddenly, the veggies were gone. I no longer had access to them. God left me, basically, with a clean piece of paper to say, “Alright, what's next? What do we do now?” I started looking. I spent about three months just praying, and reading the Bible, and looking back at the ten years of *Veggies*. It occurred to me, at one point, “Did I just spend ten years trying to get kids to behave christianly, without teaching them Christianity?”

**Dennis:** Oh, that's important! Say that again.

**Phil:** “Did I just spend ten years trying to convince kids to behave christianly, without actually teaching them Christianity?” There's a difference between saying, “Hey, kids, be forgiving because the Bible says so,” and actually teaching them Christianity so that they end up filled with the Holy Spirit and become more forgiving.

The fruit of the Spirit happens because you're filled with the Spirit. It's not homework! It doesn't happen because you try really hard. There will always be some kids that can pull it off—the kids that look good, you know? I was one of them. I could follow the rules

**Dennis:** You were a rule-keeper?

**Phil:** I am a rule-keeper. I was good at following the rules. My teachers in Sunday school loved me. My AWANA leaders loved me because I could memorize verses so fast.

**Bob:** You've got a Timothy trophy at home?

**Phil:** I've got a Timothy trophy at home; yes! So that was easy! That is not Christianity. That is memorizing things and just being good because, you know, you think you're supposed to. A lot of kids can't even do that, and they feel like failures. Even the ones who can do it—we haven't taught them Christianity. We've taught them how to behave like Christians.

**Bob:** Well, you know, you talk about the number of kids who are growing up in the church and then taking a right turn when they get out. Christian Smith, who's the—

**Phil:** I think they're taking a wrong turn, technically, Bob. [Laughter] You know, you can go your way—

**Bob:** Well, thank you for that correction.

**Phil:** Yes.

**Bob:** Christian Smith, who is a sociologist at Notre Dame, did a study to say, "What's going on here?" He came back and said that a lot of these kids are growing up, not with biblical Christianity in the church. They're growing up with—the phrase he used was—"moralistic therapeutic deism."

**Phil:** Yes.

**Bob:** There is a God. He loves you. He wants you to be happy. If you'll do these things, you'll be happy.

**Phil:** Right.

**Bob:** Well, you get out into college and you go, "That doesn't work!"

**Phil:** Right.

**Bob:** They've not learned about who God is. They've not learned the specifics. They're trying to keep a moral code.

**Phil:** Right.

**Bob:** The flesh wars against the Spirit and nobody has ever taught them about that. I think you're right. We've got to come back to, "What are the foundational building blocks?" and teach biblical Christianity.

**Phil:** Yes.

**Dennis:** And you're really calling them to deal with issues of the heart.



**Phil:** Absolutely.

**Dennis:** Because true Christianity—well, where did Moses begin in Deuteronomy, Chapter 6? He said, “You shall *love* the Lord your God with *all* your heart.” [Emphasis added]

**Phil:** Right.

**Dennis:** It’s a heart issue.

**Phil:** And I think we do a disservice to kids sometimes with the resources we give them. We give them children’s Bibles that have about 80 percent of the Bible edited out. You know, it’s really only the cute parts—the parts that make cute pictures—because we don’t think kids can handle—so, none of the parts— You hear all about God’s love. What you don’t hear is the flipside of that—about God’s holiness. If all you hear about is, “God’s love,” “God’s love,” “God’s love,”—“What do I need to worry about? I have nothing to worry about. I don’t need to *do* anything. He just loves me.”

There’s no need for a Savior if all I hear about is God’s love. That’s one of the things we’re doing very deliberately in *What’s in the Bible?*—saying, “Okay, we learn two things about God in the Old Testament. First of all, ‘Why do we have the Old Testament?’ You know, why not just skip it?” Actually, we had some people, when we launched the DVD series—they said, “If the first DVD is about Jesus, I think this would sell better.” I said, “Well, God didn’t start with Jesus.” [Laughter]

**Dennis:** He started with Genesis.

**Phil:** He started with Genesis! Yes, it started with an apple and a really bad decision.

**Bob:** By Chapter 3, Jesus shows up in the promise to the—I mean, seriously, Jesus is there.

**Phil:** Yes, He’s there. He’s there, but he doesn’t literally—the incarnation doesn’t happen in Genesis.

**Bob:** It hasn’t happened yet; right.

**Phil:** So, that’s one of the questions we answer in *What’s In the Bible?* “Why does God give us a thousand years of Israel messing up?” You know, “Once you have the flood and things are a mess—bring in Jesus. Cue the Messiah!”

No! We have a thousand years of Israel messing up over and over again. When we explain this to kids, we walk them through it. The messing up part usually isn’t in kids’ Bibles. So, they aren’t learning this in Sunday school. We see them messing up for a thousand years so we know that we can never get it right—no matter how hard we try.

We have God's rule book—you know—we have the Pentateuch. We have a thousand years. Even if we had a thousand years, we could never get it right. We could never live up to God's holiness. You have to understand God's holiness. He was so holy that people occasionally just *died!*

**Bob:** Right.

**Phil:** Just like the two brothers who ran into the temple as soon as it was dedicated—to offer a sacrifice. Boom! They dropped dead. We tell that story! That's not in any kids' Bibles because it's kind of intimidating.

**Bob:** I had a friend of mine who sent me the very first *What's In the Bible?* and said, "You've got to watch this." I took it home. My son was, at the time, I think, 16 years old. I said, "You want to watch this? It's from the *Veggie Tales* guy." He's up for it— "Yeah, sure." We sit down, and we pop it in. I think within the first—what? —ten minutes, we're learning Septuagint and Apocrypha. Is Pseudopigrapha—do you include that in there, as well?

**Phil:** I don't think we hit that one; no. I can't even pronounce that.

**Bob:** But he turns to me and says, "Who is this for?" because you are introducing some big terms.

**Phil:** It's *The Muppets go to seminary*. [Laughter] Yes, my mother teaches at the grad school at Wheaton College. She teaches graduate students who are in children's ministry. She took the first episode and showed it to a classroom full of graduate students. Every one of them afterwards said, "I learned something about the Bible that I didn't know."

Kids aren't opposed to learning things. They're opposed to being bored. They hate being bored; but if you can explain the Septuagint in a fun way, and that was one of the questions. We answer the tricky questions! Someday, your kid is going to sit down next to a Catholic friend and notice that their Bible has books in it that aren't in your Bible. If no one has ever explained that, that's really disorienting— "Why didn't anybody tell me this?"

We explain that, "Why are there more books in the Catholic Bible than there are in a Protestant Bible? Where did they come from?" We want to give kids a foundation so they won't have their faith knocked out from under them when they get to high school, when they get out of their Sunday school class, when they get out of the nursery where we've put the nice Noah's Ark wallpaper borders up that don't have any bodies floating around the ark. [Laughter] It's just all the good stuff. Have you ever noticed that?!

**Bob:** Lots of giraffes.

**Phil:** Lots of giraffes!

**Dennis:** No hooves upside down!

**Phil:** No floating, no. It is like, “Wasn’t the flood fun? That was such a fun outing!” [Laughter] NO!! It was God’s judgment on the world!

**Dennis:** Let’s go back to the judges, for a moment.

**Phil:** Yes.

**Dennis:** Everyone knows the story of Samson and Gideon; but when it comes to a judge like Jephthah, are you telling that story?

**Phil:** No. What we’re not doing is trying to tell every individual story from the Bible. What we’re doing is telling the macro story *of* the Bible. We start out by saying, “What is the Bible? It’s the story of God and us. Now let’s tell that story.”

So, if there’s a story that ties into God’s rescue plan—we talk about sin. Sin usually doesn’t come up in kids’ Bibles, either. We talk about sin, and we actually visualize it. We know the concept of sin entering creation. You know, sin—and we have the stain of sin on us. We actually visualize sin. If you’re a Trekkie, like I was when I was a kid—there was an episode called “Trouble with Tribbles”. Starship Enterprise got overrun by these little furry hamster things that just kept multiplying.

I thought, “That’s kind of like sin!” So, we made these little furry things that fall in and stick to Adam and Eve, with little faces going, “Argghh! Argghh! Argghh! Argghh! Argghh!” [Laughter] Okay, that’s the stain of sin! You’ve got sin on you, and the problem is sin can’t be close to God. So, if you have the stain of sin on you, it means you can’t be close to God. So, God made a rescue plan to get the stain of sin off of us—to take care of the problem of sin.

If kids don’t have that, you don’t even know why you need a New Testament. If all they have is Adam and Eve, and the Ark, and the Lion’s Den, and then, Jesus—it’s just a bunch of stories. So, we really need to tell the whole arc of Scripture, which includes the keys of the Fall, sin, our inability to be close to God when we have sin on us, and then, His amazing rescue plan. That’s the story of the Bible.

**Dennis:** I have to wonder—between our last interview with you 14 years ago—I do not remember you being quite as strident around some of these issues back then as you are today. We don’t have a lot of time here. What happened?

**Phil:** Yes! God did a work in me. It was really part of just looking back and saying, “Have I really taught Christianity?” Even more than that, “Am I really clear myself about what it is I’m trying to teach?”

**Dennis:** And you really want parents to not only assume the responsibility but guide their children to the right stuff.

**Phil:** Yes! That can be hard when you aren't quite sure you know it for certain yourself!

**Dennis:** To that point, Barbara, my wife, is creating a series of resources for parents to pass on the truth about God and about life. She's testing this with some people. A friend of mine went through it with his kids. He said, "You know, Dennis, the thing that I liked about what Barbara created is that it made me feel competent and confident."

**Phil:** Right.

**Dennis:** As I see what you're doing, it's something very similar. You're basically equipping moms and dads, grandmas and grandpas to be effective—to be competent and confident—as they introduce God to their children and begin to implant the real disease in the hearts of these kids.

**Bob:** Well, of course, to do that, you've got to make sure kids understand God's revelation to us, the Bible. So many kids today know stories from the Bible, as you've said; but they don't know the Bible. So many grown-ups today are in a similar spot. I really like what you've done here, Phil, with the *What's in the Bible?* series. In fact, our church has used some of these clips, not just with the kids, but in sermons for everybody because an understanding of God's story, from Genesis all the way through to Revelation, is something that's missing, not just with kids, but in the church today.

Go to [FamilyLifeToday.com](http://FamilyLifeToday.com) for more information about the *What's In the Bible?* DVD series. We've got a few of the episodes in our *FamilyLife Today* Resource Center. You can order them from us online at [FamilyLifeToday.com](http://FamilyLifeToday.com), if you'd like. Again, the website is [FamilyLifeToday.com](http://FamilyLifeToday.com); or call, toll-free, at 1-800-358-6329 if you have any questions about the *What's In the Bible?* DVD series from Phil Vischer. The phone number is 1-800-358-6329; that's 1-800-"F" as in family, "L" as in life, and then the word, "TODAY".

You know, we are very grateful for those of you who listen regularly to *FamilyLife Today*. In fact, last month, we heard from a number of listeners who have been regular listeners but had never made a donation to help support *FamilyLife Today*. We appreciate those of you who got in touch with us and let us know that you're listening and that you appreciate this ministry.

Without those donations received from time to time from folks like you, we could not continue this program. We just want you to know how much we appreciate your financial support. In fact, this month, if you're able to help with a donation to support the ministry of *FamilyLife Today*, we'd love to send you a CD with some thoughts I was able

to share, not long ago, with women who attended the True Woman® conference. I think this was back a couple of years ago.

They asked me to speak on “What Husbands Wish Their Wives Knew about Men”. We have that message on audio CD. We would love to send it to you as our thank-you gift when you support the ministry of *FamilyLife Today*, this month, with a donation. You can make your donation online at FamilyLifeToday.com. Just click the button that says, “I CARE”. When you do that, we’ll send the CD out to you automatically; or call 1-800-FL-TODAY. Make a donation over the phone and ask for the CD on “What Husbands Wish Their Wives Knew about Men”. Again, our toll-free number is 1-800-FL-TODAY. Thanks, in advance, for your financial support. We appreciate you and it’s always good to hear from you.

And we hope you can be back with us again tomorrow. Phil Vischer’s going to be here again. We’re going to hear about some of the challenges—the bumpy road that God had Phil walk to get him to where he is today and the project he’s working on right now, *What’s in the Bible?* We’ll hear about that tomorrow. I hope you can be back with us for that.

I want to thank our engineer today, Keith Lynch, and our entire broadcast production team. On behalf of our host, Dennis Rainey, I’m Bob Lepine. We will see you back tomorrow for another edition of *FamilyLife Today*.

*FamilyLife Today* is a production of FamilyLife of Little Rock, Arkansas.  
Help for today. Hope for tomorrow.

Song: Judges

Artist: The Bentley Brothers

Album: Buck Denver Presents...What's in the Bible? —The Songs! © 2011 Jellyfish Labs

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