



## Chicago Is Not a Mirage: Testing the Globe *with* Rob Skiba

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*“Their weapons were ready, the mockers were trained, the prowlers were waiting.”*

Tom Gordon, *Space Prison*

### ONCE THE DEVIL

“ROB SKIBA is the devil,” my friend said. *Bunyan*. For the remainder of this article, that’s what we’ll call him—Bunyan (though I don’t really suspect he’ll come into it often). And if I were to dial *him* up on the phone, *the devil* that is; then our friendship, Bunyan’s and mine, would come to an

abrupt and immediate end. No more late-night doctrinal discussions, bleeding our intellectual inquiries into one speaker and out another receiver while sipping on coffee, reciting Scripture verses. Rob Skiba may have been a flat earthist, just as Bunyan and I were, but that was non-circumstantial evidence at best. Rob Skiba enticed reprobate minds, and I listened in to the tune of the Pied Piper. GOODBYE. I was cooking dinner over the stove, parmesan chicken with Brussel sprouts, when he inscribed his warning in a private message, and my fingers shook. It wasn’t the first time I’d heard Bunyan describe Skiba in

such dastardly terms, and so I knew he was serious.

Then again, Bunyan wasn't the only one.

Rob Skiba *clearly* hasn't read Scripture for himself, *they say*. Rob Skiba is an ambulance chaser, a legalist in pursuit of foolish genealogies, *they say*. Rob Skiba is a Judaizer, *they say*. Rob Skiba is so spiritually weak as to grasp the straws of work-based salvation, *they say*. Rob Skiba has fallen from grace, *they say*. And another thing *they say*, Rob Skiba is bewitched.

Or in slightly other terms, Rob Skiba is the devil.

Essentially, Rob Skiba's crime was the **Torah**, a breach of new covenant in which Deputy Darby and the dispensation police would gladly arrest him over. For this reason alone, I adhered to the warnings of his detractors and, despite the *shape* of the world, purposed to keep our distance from the *shape* of his humanity—in fact as far away from Rob Skiba as possible.

There was, however, only one complication.

A year earlier I was contacted by several *separate* individuals, all of whom had hoped to enlist me in hampering the pervasive pestilence of **Torah pursuance** by disproving the claims of its adherents. *Stop these devils*. This would be easily done, I told them. After all, wasn't the Law a curse? Wasn't it nailed to the cross? Haven't they fallen from grace? Are they not bewitched? I agreed, and told them I'd commit myself to a write-up, an entire book if I had to, on Paul's claim to fame—his first epistle, Galatians—using simple, concise logic.

And so, I opened up Galatians and began reading.

The circumcision issue became an immediate splinter in my mind. By insisting that his Gentile converts not be

circumcised by the Pharisees, hadn't Paul disposed of the Law? Weren't we living in the age of grace, Rob Skiba? Hadn't these **Torah observants** read the New Testament for themselves?

Apparently not.

An entire calendar year passed, and people began to wonder—why isn't Noel writing against the **Torah observers**? It wasn't for lack of dedication. I simply couldn't stop turning the issue over and over and over again, like an unsolved crime investigation from centuries past. Did Paul throw out the Law, or didn't he—hasn't two-thousand years of church fathers settled the issue? I was always spoon-fed, from the time I could talk, that the Apostle was indeed selected by God to dismantle the Law, and we weren't to question that. His circumcision argument was proof enough, was it not? And then one day I was speaking with Bunyan on the phone, desperately trying to close the case in our favor, and it silently occurred to me—what if circumcision was *never* about salvation?

I had never actually spoken with a **Torah observant** individual before, and for once, I wanted to understand their position. The poet laureate Billy Collins once told me there's essentially only two kinds of people in the world—poets and writers. A poet, he said, sits by the window gazing out, inviting the whole world to look in, while a writer stands outside, and eagerly peeping in upon the poets and other souls with open curtain policies, in hopes of understanding them. For the most part I am a writer, and so naturally, I thought about Rob Skiba's window.

I wanted to peep in. After all, his shades weren't drawn. And I let Bunyan know about it.

So, there I was, having listened in to the tune of the Pied Piper, and standing now over the kitchen stove, fingers trembling. *It's been nice talking with you.* GOODBYE. I considered my options. Like, maybe I'd delete Rob Skiba from my contacts and then finally get around to writing that scathing paper on **Torah observers**, using Galatians as my guide. Perhaps my confidence with Bunyan wasn't completely lost. But the thing is—he'd already inferred it. Bunyan had already insinuated our wondrous conversations meant so little to him as to completely scrub them off his intellectual frying pan. He was willing, and had threatened on no uncertain terms, to end our relationship cold turkey *if* I simply called him up on the phone.

I was brokenhearted. Rob Skiba's *flat earth* had already cost me too many friendships.

Those dominoes would surely continue to fall. But I had questions.

The existentialist Kierkegaard once wrote, "There are two ways to be fooled. One is to believe what *isn't* true; the other is to refuse to believe what *is* true." I picked up the phone and I dialed Rob, wondering if I were *either* of the Danish philosopher's fools.

1984

THE FIRST half of the Reagan administration was nearing its end when Mr. Cooper kicked Rick Hummer out of his sixth-grade class. Chicago could *not* be seen from across Lake Michigan. If Mr. Cooper reinforced this point, it is because *naturally* the earth was a globe. I mean, how could it not be? But Hummer wasn't arguing that point. Hummer

relegated the observable and practical fact that he'd gone fishing many times with his dad on that very body of water, and *naturally* they could see the city of Chicago. *That's not possible*, his teacher replied. But Hummer insisted.

Mr. Cooper called Rick Hummer a *liar*.

He and his father would slide out upon the water just before the sun came up, he told me over the phone, "and you could see the light in the sky coming. But there was no ball yet in the sky, no rays of sunlight yet—it was just the color coming in, and those were the days, those were the mornings when *literally* Chicago was right there. I mean, you could see it perfectly clear, and the only thing that happened, as we went out on the water, is that Chicago got *bigger*. And some days Chicago looked *huge*. It looked like it was only 10 miles out."

Hummer told Mr. Cooper, "You can call me a liar, but you wouldn't dare call my dad a liar."

*Get out of my class.*

Hummer did just that. He sat in the office, just outside the Principal Jenkin's door, and thinking only the mother of that cute girl in his class was listening in, as he made a case in his defense, arguing mostly to himself, "Mr. Cooper is a jerk," not knowing his principal was listening in.

"Mr. Hummer," Principal Jenkins said, "Come with me."

But he didn't take Hummer to suspension, as he suspected he might. Jenkins, as it turns out, was in the coast guard. They returned to class, and when *that jerk* Mr. Cooper protested his prior disturbances, his principal said: "I'm gonna stop you right there. Do you realize how many times I've been able to see Chicago from across Lake Michigan?"

“I don’t know.” Mr. Cooper shrugged apathetically. “You tell me.”

“All the time,” said Jenkins.

“It’s *not* in the workbook,” Mr. Cooper suggested. But his voice only seemed to weaken. “Maybe the workbook is wrong.”

Rick Hummer was vindicated—for *now*. Chicago could in fact be seen from across Lake Michigan. He knew it, his dad knew it, and apparently the coast guard knew it, *despite* curriculum. But it was 1984, and clearly as the Reagan administration prepared for its second term, he had bigger things to worry about than the 1984 that was Orson Wells or the *shape* of the earth from across Lake Michigan. Hummer was on the verge of becoming a man. And *naturally*, the *shape* of another sex was on his mind.

Hummer never thought about his victory again—that is, until his grandmother died.

## DARK NIGHT OF THE SOUL

HE WAS A SINGLE MAN LIVING IN A sweltering apartment complex rife with hot women. As the recipient of a cheating wife and an agonizing divorce, Rob Skiba stood naked and alone under the shower nozzle, desperately attempting to relate to being a man *and* the bride of Christ.

“The temptations were unbelievable,” he said. “And they were everywhere.”

The year was 2003, and Skiba was *going crazy*. “I spent most of 2003 praying a lot, crying a lot, and reading my Bible a lot. That’s all I did for the whole year. The shower sort of became my prayer closet. And I was like, *Okay, I’m physically naked and I’m spiritually naked before you, Father*, and I’d have very long prayer times until the water got cold.” Skiba spent so many days

locked in his apartment that it literally felt at times like a tangible, *knowable* presence dwelt right beside him, dispensing riches of revelation, and his prayer times would last for hours. In fact, it was the closest he’d felt to God in his entire life.

That is, until God “pulled a *Song of Solomon* on me.”

Skiba paused on the phone. “Have you ever heard the phrase, *the dark night of the soul?*”

“Yes,” I said.

“Are you familiar with the concept of it—what it represents?”

“Explain it to me.”

“Well, it’s basically *the Song of Solomon*. Here’s this great romance, right? All of the sudden, the husband distances himself, and he watches her from behind bushes and stuff, as the woman kind of goes crazy, like, ‘*Where are you, my beloved?*’ What is she going to do? Is she going to seek after him to try to find him and never give up or go off with someone else? You know, it’s like this test.”

Skiba soon found himself weeping in the shower and pleading: “Father, I need a touch, a word, *something*. I need to know you’re still here.”

His answer came when God gently whispered into an ear.

*That’s what happened to your first marriage. That’s why your wife left you.*

“I was a workaholic,” Skiba explained. “And you know—men and women have different needs. And she had gotten to the point where she needed a word, a touch, something to show that I still cared—even though I did. I just wasn’t apparently showing it enough for her, you know. And she went off and found another. But I got to take responsible on my part for why the marriage fell apart.”

His mentor in Texas told him, “Rob, I know that you’re not enjoying the single life, but this is your opportunity to work on your relationship with God. Work on *that*.”

Together they studied the ten love languages and Skiba began to notice something. Not one of his needs was being met. “I was single and going crazy,” he said, “And I felt like God was telling me, ‘*Yeah, I know what you mean. I get it.*’”

“I feel like the Holy Spirit was impressing upon me, if I’m married to God, we’re made in God’s *likeness*, then how do I apply these ten love languages in my relationship with God? Well, all the ones on the woman’s side I can pretty much spiritualize enough, but on the male side, you’ve got *sex*. That’s the number one, right? *Sex*. How does that work with God? I’m his bride, and like, *what and how...?* And I started thinking, if *sex* is the act of one person willingly opening themselves up, so to speak, to receive the other in an intimate relationship, where the two become one, I could see how, spiritually speaking, I could work that with God. Like, opening myself up to receive Him, and try to be one with Him, and work on that. The other typically second in the line of the 5 love needs of men is an attractive spouse, and that goes back to number 1. Men are visually stimulated. A man wants and needs someone who is attractive. How attractive am I being to God when I’m wallowing around in a pig-sty—not making myself pretty to God, so to speak? How pretty am I to God when I’m sinning?”

“When I had that *Song of Solomon dark night of the soul* moment, all of the sudden I understood what it was to be that bride, that woman, crying out needing that word; that touch; any show of affection from her husband, because I wasn’t getting any. God was trying to tell me, ‘*Look, let’s work on you first. And let’s work on us.*’”

In the meantime, hot women surrounded him. “That’s one of the reasons I locked myself in my apartment. I was like, “I want that, I want that, I want that, I need a woman, I need a woman! But God was like, ‘Okay, maybe you’ll understand this now for your second time in marriage.’”

*That is, if you get a second time around.*

+ PAUL

*Here’s the church and there’s the steeple.*

*Open the door and see all the people.*

WHEN the future Mrs. Skiba *finally* came into his life, Skiba was immediately drawn in by her desire for acumen of a spiritual nature, particularly “the way she was really pressing in,” he recalled, “and attempting to understand the gifts of the Spirit.” Their church however, it was a Baptist denomination, had chosen the seeker friendly path. And no surprise, “their sermons immediately became watered down.” Something in her *spirit*, in fact in both of them, simply didn’t sit right. It was the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and so they tried the internet.

Rob Skiba grew up in the church. He was saved by the age of 7. His early biography might even read as follows: Whenever church doors were *opened*, Rob Skiba *entered*. Ministry surrounded him. The habits of his upbringing spoke of the finger game nursery rhyme, but never a virtual house church. But at last, he found something to groan about, and groan about with a spiritual partner.

“We went from being on fire to becoming starving to death in the desert,” Skiba said. But it was a *necessary* crawl through the

entanglements of theological tinder. Their friends Kevin and Amanda encouraged them to attend a Bible study of *another* nature.

### **Torah.**

The very word which entices the Hebrew Law of YHWH, with its 613 rules for righteous living, essentially the first five books of the Bible, is anthropological for most, and likely just as equally frightening. Dispensationalists shudder. And yet Mr. and Mrs. Skiba were weary of the abstract. They were hungry for something to chew on. Invitation accepted. Skiba even remembers the day on which his thirst was finally quenched. It was the day after Good Friday, 2010.

### *Sabbath.*

The Torah portion that week covered Joseph's unfortunate *tumble* into a ditch. The facilitator told everyone to take a sheet of paper and write Yeshua on the right and then Joseph on the left, with a column down the middle, and then see how many parallels they could come up with. Just off the top of his head Skiba came up with 25 parallels. The group came up with 50. He was awed by their knowledge of *both* the New and the Old Testament. Torah apparently gave brilliant insight to the lives of Jesus and His Apostles—who knew?

That was his introduction to **Torah observance**.

“It was a new depth and richness to our Bible study to what we had before,” Skiba said. “Weeks before that we were studying the differences between law and grace and I had literally taught: ‘*Yeah, you want to get under the Law, pick up sticks on Saturday and see how that works out for you.*’ I was quoting from Numbers 15, where the dude went out and picked up sticks on a Saturday and was stoned to death for it. And then, of course,

anything I would have said would have been from Paul. Naturally, I had the same knee-jerk reaction as everybody. *What about Paul?*”

Not so long afterwards Rob and Sheila were sitting around listening to the internet again. The passage focused on the woman caught in adultery in John 8:1-11. Jesus was at the Temple in Jerusalem teaching, with a healthy crowd gathered around him, when the teachers of Torah and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in the act of adultery, even going so far as to salute her for His audience. The story follows that Jesus, having been asked what **Torah** instructs on the matter—or rather, demanding that she be stoned; bent down and wrote in the dust. His antagonists demanded an answer, and so before resuming His letters in the dirt, Jesus stood up and said, “Let the one who has never sinned throw the first stone!”

His accusers of course slipped away, one by one, until only Jesus and the woman remained in the crowd. He then asked the woman, “Where are your accusers? Didn't even one of them condemn you?”

“No, Lord,” she said.

Jesus responded, “Neither do I. Go and sin no more.”

To this effect, Skiba said, “Sheila had the suggestion, what if we replace the generic word with the Biblical definition of sin, which is given point blank in John.” She is of course referencing 1 John 3:4, which states: *Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law.* “So she's caught in adultery, and Jesus says to her, ‘Go, and transgress the Law no more.’”

Upon hearing it suggested for the first time, Skiba just sat there in his chair, and

thought *huh, that's an interesting way to look at that.*

*Yeah, but what about Paul...?*

Paul, indeed! Skiba then set out to revisit all the writings of the Apostle's writings where he talks about sin. "And Paul talks about sin a lot. So if you just replace the word *sin* with the *Biblical definition* of sin, you'll see Paul is saying over and over and over and over and over and over again that we shouldn't transgress the law, aka sin. A friend then told me, 'Well, when you can get Paul to agree with himself, come back and argue with me,' and I thought, *that's a brilliant statement*—because, if Paul is saying we shouldn't sin, aka transgress the Law, and you think he's against the Law, then you've got a guy that is constantly contradicting himself. That—or we have to reevaluate what we *think* Paul is saying."

The reality of Paul's *actual* message, often misunderstood, must have swept over Skiba with rapid clarity and succession, and in a likewise manner as he excitedly rehearsed Scripture for me over the phone, and I frantically set about to scribble them down.

"Should we therefore sin that grace may abound? God forbid!"

Also, "It is the carnal mind that is enmity to God, and cannot be subject to the Law!"

And then, "1 Corinthians 11:1: Imitate me as I imitate Christ!"

Skiba continued, "Well, if I look at the life of Yeshua, he lived his life in perfect obedience to the Father. And John backs Paul up. 1 John 2: *Whoever claims to abide in Him must walk as Jesus walked.* So how could Paul say *imitate me* if he was going around saying we don't need to obey God anymore? Scripture says you need a minimum of 2 to 3 witnesses to establish truth. So if you believe Paul has a message

that is contrary to the other 43 plus authors of Scripture written over 1400 years, where is your second witness? Because if you cannot find a second witness then you are by Scripture mandated to throw Paul out."

"And Deuteronomy 13 is even *worse*," Skiba was caught up by the breeze of his excitement by this point, and barely had time to breathe. "It's called the Deuteronomy 13 test—the litmus test for who is a true prophet. And one of them is, if he's going around telling people that we need to dismiss the Law of Moses then you're supposed to kill the dude. He's a false prophet." To this Skiba concludes. "Luckily *my Paul* passes the Deuteronomy 13 test, and *my Paul* is not in contradiction to everyone else. But Peter, this was a huge revelation to me—if you read the introduction to 1 Peter, in the list that he gives, Galatia is his audience for his first epistle. His second epistle is written to the same people, because he refers to the first one. So when you read the last chapter of 2<sup>nd</sup> Peter, he's writing to the Galatians, saying: *You know what?* Some of Paul's writings are difficult to understand, which the ignorant twist and distort to their own destruction and fall into the error of lawlessness. It's written to the Galatians!"

With that stunning realization, Skiba's future in the *history* of the church was defined. Within two years he would create the Virtual House Church online. It was a project, he concluded, by which he gleaned more from Scripture in the first year of doing than in forty prior years of entering through the doors of the Baptist church. But his greatest battle for Scriptural integrity was still to come.

## FLAT EARTH I

PAGAN holidays had already estranged Rick Hummer from his family years before he stood in his garage speaking to Rob Skiba over the phone. Hummer had dared to call them *pagan*. His family disagreed. They were sitting around watching football one Christmas and had advised him to stop making a point of it.

*Just shut up and eat some pie, Rick.*

Hummer took their advice. He stood up, helped himself to a slice of pie, told his mother *goodbye*, and cordially left, crumbs spilling from his mouth.

Long story short, he had already wrestled with that and the Federal Reserve long before Rob Skiba called him up on the phone to work a mind-bending question into their conversation. Unbeknownst to either of them, a photographer by the name of Joshua Nowicki had already stood alongside the Indiana shoreline, pointing his camera westward across Lake Michigan towards Chicago, and snapped a photo.

Skiba asked, “Have you seen any of this *flat earth* stuff?”

Hummer laughed.

“That’s probably out there to discredit the truth community,” he said.

*Eh*, Skiba said.

“What do you mean, *eh*..? Are you saying there’s something to this?”

*Well, uh*, Skiba.

Hummer said, “Dude, I can see Chicago across Lake Michigan.”

And then Rob said, “What...? How far is that?”

“I don’t know. But I can tell you this. I got kicked out of class one time for saying I

could see Chicago from across Lake Michigan.” *And guess what...? My principal was in the coast guard, and he agreed.*

“There’s got to be a way to do a test,” Skiba said.

“And by test,” Hummer explained over the phone, “Rob wanted to *prove* we lived on a sphere.”

Oddly enough, that very night, WBND 57, a local affiliate of ABC in South Bend, Indiana, which was Hummer’s market, the weatherman showed Nowicki’s photo of the Chicago skyline from across Lake Michigan.

“What you’re looking at here is a *mirage*,” the weatherman said. “We would typically not be able to see this from the Lake Michigan shore. We talked about this last night. Conditions are right on the lake that we’re actually seeing a mirage of the Chicago skyline. Very interesting—now here’s what’s happening. Here’s a good example of a *superior* mirage. Joshua was on the Lake Michigan shore. He was looking towards the west, and Chicago’s *beyond the horizon*. He should not be able to see it. However, with the right conditions we have an inversion. We have cold air near the cold lake water and some relatively warmer air above it. This will bend the image of that skyline back towards the viewer. So typically, we would not be able to see this—it would be viewable from much, much higher in the sky—up in space. But instead, we’re able to see it on the Lake Michigan shore.”

Memories of Mr. Cooper and the sixth grade flooded Hummer’s memories as he stood there gazing at his television set.

*That’s not a mirage*, he said.



## FLAT EARTH II

THE WAY *flat earth* SIMPLY ROLLED OFF Skiba's tongue—*flat earth*—*flat earth*. The mere fact that he could say it, *flat earth*, and have the candor to look into those two adjoined words without lampooning them into a sailing off the world's edge caricature, proved an immediate embarrassment to respected leaders of the **Torah** movement.

"All of the sudden," Skiba said, "I'm a bad reflection on them. They didn't want to be guilty by association, so they did everything they could to get rid of me."

*This* was 2015—April, specifically. Ask almost anyone who happened to stumble upon *flat earth* in 2015 and they'll likely adjoin another two synonymous words. Mark Sargent. Skiba can even remember the date. It was Monday, April the 13<sup>th</sup> when he discovered Sargent's *Flat Earth Clues*. Within two days Skiba invited him onto his own show and worse, he publicly confessed his willingness to look into it. Skiba found himself a subject of blushing ridicule at the United Torah Conference in San Diego, where he had been invited as a keynote speaker. "So here I was at a panel discussion—with all fairly prominent well-known people within the community," Skiba recalled. "And the *very first* question as the panel gets started, the moderator asks, 'So Rob, are you still sold on the fact that the earth is flat?'"

The room immediately erupted with the melody of misanthropists. Everybody, *including* those on the panel, laughed.

Skiba responded, "Well, I'll tell you this, I am not sold on this. I'm just beginning to look into it. But one thing that I am becoming sold on is everybody in the Bible

believed in it, so we're going to have to deal with *that*."

"That very moment I felt like I might as well get off the stage right now, because it's clear nobody is going to listen to anything I say after this." The **Torah** crowd has been the worst to deal with, where the subject of *flat earth* is concerned. "*Way worse*, because going **Torah** makes you deal with friends and family as it is. People don't want to introduce or recommend their friends to a guy who believes the earth is flat."

If only they knew Skiba had seen *Star Wars* at the age of seven. No, not *Episode IV: A New Hope*. The year was 1977, and Skiba had seen *Star Wars*. If only they had let that sink in. He was born one month before the Apollo 11 moon landing, and still kept in his possession his father's photo album of the event, whereby he stood in front of their television snapping prints. Skiba was a Trekkie.

And once, Apollo 15 astronaut Jim Irwin visited his church.

This was 2015. J.J. Abrams, the man who had only recently rebooted the *Star Trek* films had been given the keys to the kingdom and was currently shooting another *Star Wars* film. At that very moment the poster that Irwin had signed, and which depicted him saluting Skiba from the moon, still remained hung in his apartment.

It read:

Robert Skiba,

Reach for your dreams.

Aim high.

*Jim Irwin.*

If only they *knew* Irwin would obstinately remain on his wall, that he would defiantly salute him daily from the moon, for another entire year. If only they *knew* how painful this truly was.

Then again, laughter is often a tool for relieving subconscious stress, and they had reason to fear. Skiba did too. If the writers of Scripture believed the earth to be flat, then perhaps God did too. And siding with a God who disagrees with *everyone* is a dangerous thing.

## RICK HUMMER

RICK HUMMER'S daughter was long overdue for a bath, and if she didn't take one soon, "Mommy would return home," he recalled, "and Daddy would be in trouble." The shoebox had been sitting out front on his porch for a week, neglected and nearly forgotten. "They always came in and out through the side door," he said. Hummer had been asked to collect whatever remained of his personal possessions from his grandmother's house before the upcoming auction. He remembered leaving his box there, filled with cherished items from his childhood. While standing in her garage he remembered being a young man in the 1990's, preparing to move out to Los Angeles to strike his fortune, and sliding the shoebox exactly where it remained on the shelf. Still sealed shut with tape—exactly as he had left it some two decades prior. So he threw it into the back of his truck, whereupon he halfheartedly stored it on the front porch, rather than bring it inside.

Something also needed to be done with *that*. And his wife was returning home soon with explicit instructions that his daughter receive a bath. But Rob Skiba was an emotional wreck over the phone. So he paced back and forth in his house delaying the inevitable, listening to the groans of his friend.

"I'm getting attacked left and right," Skiba said. "I'm pulling everything down. I'm done. I don't care anymore. I'm done."

Hummer's pleas went something like this: "Rob, you can't quit. You *cannot*. Listen, you know you'll be hated for His name's sake, and if you're taking on what is quite possibly the strong delusion that God may have sent, a delusion *so real* that even the very elect can be deceived—if this is the framing work of what's coming, then you've got to be able to stay in the game." Hummer had hoped to act as his locker room coach by this point. "You know this is coming! You know it could all go down in our lifetime."

*Just stop it. I'm done.*

"Do you know how many people are looking at the Bible for the first time because of things you've said about this?"

*I gotta go.*

Skiba hung up.

It was right at that moment, Hummer explained, that he looked out the window at the shoe box sitting on his front porch. He remembered everything that was in there, exactly as he had packed it some two decades earlier. His daughter desperately needed a bath before *Mommy* returned home, and the thought occurred to him, she could play with the GI Joe scuba diver in the box.

So, he went outside to unseal it.

## WHEN LIGHTNING STRIKES

IN A YOUTUBE VIDEO TITLED "*1984, Flat Earth, God Answers*," Rick Hummer can be seen on his front porch only moments after opening up the time capsule from his grandmother's garage. Clearly, a GI Joe scuba diver is no longer his item of interest

here. A standard paper folder is. It is of a pinkish hue, and reads, “The Ricker Hummer, S.S. 1990,” with a doodle of a Nike shoe, apparently farting. S.S. is undoubtedly an acronym for Social Studies, with 1990 being the anticipated year of his high school graduation. Though it is certainly possible 1990 was written subsequently considering the fact that Nike Air wasn’t introduced until 1987. *The Ricker Hummer* is the sole contribution of a girl named Tricia, who has neatly scribbled the words, Hummer assures me, during group study. A child of the Reagan administration will likely understand the reference to Ricky Schroder’s character in *Silver Spoons*. Perhaps Tricia had a thing for Rick Hummer, or maybe she had a crush on Ricky Schroder and wanted to let *the Ricker* know about it, or worse, maybe it was indeed 1987, the very year *Silver Spoons* was canceled, and she was mourning that terrible fact—who knows? But either way, it was the 1980’s, and Hummer had far more to worry about than the *shape* of the earth.

“When I opened up the box there was a folder sitting in there on top,” he recalled over the phone. “I didn’t pack this thing in the box. I put action figures in the box. I put some Hot Wheels cars in the box. And some melted army guys... And here I am looking at the folder, and I had told Rob and Mark Sargent, both of those guys and my wife, I just wanted to see what *they used against me* again.” Rick Hummer wanted to see the ball propaganda—the indoctrination from his youth. Just like the Huey Lewis and the News song—Hummer desperately wanted to go *back in time*. Don’t we all? “I just wanted to hold it,” a *horse blinder* from his past. “And so here I was on my front porch holding it for the first time after one of my best buds hangs up on me, because he’s that

frustrated with people accusing him of being a fool.”

He immediately thought to record it—but not necessarily for the world. Hummer only had his friend in mind.

And for this reason, it is the paperwork inside his social studies folder which gingerbread the videos interest, a school assignment which looked and even felt, Hummer recalled, as if it had just come out of his locker.

The very first sheet of paper, once opening its flap, is dated Wednesday, February 1, 1984. It is titled: “Maps and Globes are Tools of Geography,” and there is one specific question towards the bottom of that page which asks, “What were the early ideas about the shape of the earth?”

Hummer enthusiastically reads his sixth-grade answer for the camera.

“The earth was...” he begins to say.

It is precisely while pronouncing *flat*, and not a second to the left or right of it, when lightning strikes. Lightning which struck *so close*, Hummer recalled over the phone, “I could literally smell it.”

His daughter can be heard pronouncing *lightning* as if it were a cautionary warning but no great thing (after all, this is the Midwest), while Hummer turns the camera back on his own self, visually stunned, perhaps even spooked. It is evident, by the pronunciation of his eyes alone, that the script has taken an unexpected turn. His voice seems shaken, but he bolsters it, as if to hide that fact, while reinforcing the *theme* of his video: “Like I said, you can’t write this stuff. You follow me?”

## PHIL COLLINS

BUT it did little to change his mind. By August of that year, nearly all of Rob Skiba's financial support had dried up. His father-in-law was on hospice and dying in his living room. Entire ministries had banned him from even attending their conferences, much less speaking at them. If only lightning could strike *twice*. The derisive hilarity born that day at the United Torah Conference had mushroomed into such malignant proportions—even people whom he once called *friend* had joined in with the public flogging—that Skiba closed his investigative website, *Testing the Globe*, for good.

*Globe earth, flat earth—Screw this*, he said.

Anyone who happened to type [testingtheglobe.com](http://testingtheglobe.com) into their search engine on Sunday, August 16, 2015, will be able to testify to the fact that they were treated to a Phil Collins song on each and every page. *Globe earth, flat earth*, Collins apparently felt the same way.

*I Don't Care Anymore*.

## THE ATHEIST

IT took an atheist, or rather, a *former* atheist, for Skiba to tear the wall that was Phil Collins down. That information, he said, had radically changed his life. More specifically, he KNEW there was a Creator.

In other words, *how dare you, Rob Skiba*.

So, on Thursday, August 20, only four days later, it was time for Rob Skiba to care again.

## “CHICAGO IS *not* A MIRAGE...”

“SO, when I started looking at all this stuff, and how easy it is for a news guy to come on, a weatherman—this meteorologist, to come on and just wisp it away as, *what you're seeing here is a mirage*, and that's supposed to be accepted science....” Hummer shook his head at the memory. “They ended up doing a big special on the news, and they went to the university of Notre Dame, and they had a professor of physics explain away how the mirage works, but they *didn't* say that it could also occur in magnification of humidity across a flat plane. They *left* that element out. They left that entire piece of evidence, which is also proof—they left it out.”

Hummer called Skiba on the phone, “You're not going to believe what my local weather guy said.”

And then he told him.

Skiba thought about it, “What do you think it would take to charter a boat?”

Hummer grinned, “I'll get right on it.”

“Neither one of us knew about lensing and all that,” Hummer explained. “Rob ended up doing that experiment at his house with a—I think it was a 99-cent visor—it's one of his best videos showing exactly what can happen, because he did the exact same experiment which they did at the university of Notre Dame, and Rob showed a completely different variable which they—they were trying to trick people, or they were tricking themselves. You know, they were leaving something very pertinent out. And after doing tests and everything else you find that water humidity, or water particulates, can actually create a lensing effect, which in turn can create magnification, which would then chop the bottoms of the buildings off due to

magnification and light bending, or rather, pushing the images downward.”

Hummer quickly concluded they were gonna need a boat—a *big* boat.

If it was a mirage, if Hummer had been spending his entire life staring at a mirage from a city leaning up and over and down a curve, then the mirage would magically disappear and, as they rolled over the ball, the *true* city would appear. But if it wasn't a mirage, as Hummer was quite certain of, then the city would just get bigger and bigger and bigger. Their idea was to put a camera on it from across the lake. If it was a mirage, it would *naturally* disappear. But if it wasn't, Chicago would *naturally* only get bigger in the frame of their camera. They'd need a boat—a *big* boat and a gyroscope. And a gimbal with a camera and a level—they'd need one of those. They needed to show that they never once went over a curve, or down a curve, or up a curve, or whatever direction you want to call it.

And so, they plotted.

Timing problems, however, *and* budget problems, *and* personal scheduling problems, would plague them. “It took us over a year to get it done,” Hummer said.

Meanwhile, while they plotted their experiment on Lake Michigan, Hummer saw his friend “going into a very specific scientific mind. *Let me prove these things to be true.*” But by this, Hummer stressed, Skiba was ultimately implying, “let me prove the *sphere*. He was really trying to hold onto that for a time. And finally one day I said to him, Rob, you believe the Bible right?”

*Duh*, Skiba.

“Then you're a Biblical earther, dude. Even if it *is* flat—then so what? If the Bible *says* it, can you accept that? Of course, the world

isn't going to accept it. But can you, Rob Skiba, accept it?”

Didn't Hummer understand? This was 2015. Skiba had seen *Star Wars* in 1977 before it became a Roman numeral in a second trilogy. Skiba was a Trekkie. The man who agreed to charter a boat across Lake Michigan with him had a signed poster of Apollo 15 astronaut Jim Irwin hung upon his wall.

He even came to his church once.

*Reach for your dreams, Robert. Aim high.*

There were of course the howls of laughter, bellows of subconscious fear, to deal with—and Phil Collins. Growing numbers of flat earthists, in part to Skiba's own skeptical investigation, all of whom were scattered and secluded across the earth, repeatedly asked: Was Rob Skiba a flat earthist—or wasn't he? Was he—or wasn't he? Was he...?

Or then again, wasn't he?

In June of 2016 they would once more *hold* their breath because, after one year of talking about Chicago and plotting, Skiba had discovered a small window of opportunity, when both his and Hummer's schedule opened up, and Skiba had the money saved up, and a ten-day weather forecast that looked promising. Skiba booked an impromptu flight on Wednesday June 22, 2016, with the hopes of setting out on Friday the 24<sup>th</sup>, an early birthday present.

Hummer said, “I called around. I charted a boat. I found a guy who runs a fishing charter boat. But I told him, we're not dropping any lines into the water. We just want to go across the water. We want to go across the lake as far as we can go, to where we can actually see the water go up to the shoreline, and then we can turn around and go back.”

The captain, his name was Captain Tony; his company was Salmon Hunter Fishing Charters; he dealt primarily with fishermen, and was curious, “What are you guys doing?”

“We just want to get video of Chicago on a lapsed time experiment going from one point to the other,” Hummer explained, “and see what happens to the actual visuals of the city.”

Captain Tony said, “Depending on humidity, you can see the city anytime, so long as it’s not humid.” June in Indiana and Illinois is *quite* humid. “It’s a curtain. Rain acts like a curtain. The curtain comes down, you can’t see what’s backstage.”

Hummer paused on the phone, and he told me, “That’s a great analogy.”

By June of 2016, Skiba’s *purpose* had changed. Despite holding onto the globe, he found himself rooting once again for the literal intent of Hebrew Scripture. “The one goal I had,” Skiba told me, that is, while jumping onto that flight for Chicago, “was to prove the image people were seeing from across Lake Michigan was *not* a mirage—that they are actually seeing the city.”

Growing numbers of flat earthists everywhere, scattered across the plain, *held* their breath—and prayed.

“So, the guys telling me on the phone what to expect, and he said it’s gonna be June, man,” Hummer said. “It’s gonna be hot, and it’s gonna be muggy. Don’t expect to see Chicago until we’re almost there.” Hummer relayed that message to Skiba. “Don’t keep your hopes up.”

They arrived at the harbor before their scheduled appointment with Salmon Hunter Fishing Charters. In fact, they were still brushing their teeth when Captain Tony had departed with his first charter of the day. When he returned his slip with his

party of fishermen, he looked right at Hummer and Skiba, waiting upon the dock, and said, “I don’t know what you guys did.”

*Prayer.*

“I don’t know *what* you guys did or *how* you did this,” Tony reiterated that point while they gassed up, “but you wouldn’t believe what sort of view you’re gonna have today. I’ve *never* in my entire life seen Chicago so clear in the month of June—*never*.”

*Prayer*, Hummer collapsed with relief. *Prayer works.*

When they came around the corner out of the boat slips and the lake opened up before them, the captain announced, “There’s Chicago.”

“What, where!?” Rob.

They were still 37 nautical miles from the Willis Tower.

“Right there,” Hummer grinned. “You’re looking at it.”

They didn’t even have their cameras ready.

## MR. COOPER WAS WRONG

THEY were about halfway to the city which is *not permitted* to be seen by the naked eye, and Captain Tony, having heard Hummer mumbling something about how he couldn’t see a curve anywhere out there on the water, said, “Of course water’s *flat*.”

“Then the earth cannot possibly be a ball,” Hummer said.

“Well, that’s *not* true,” their captain retorted.

Hummer chanced the principal’s office again. “Then how can you have *flat* water, going on level forever, and still curve around a flat ball?”

“I don’t know,” he shrugged, perhaps with indifference. “That will make your head hurt thinking about it, though.”

But Hummer’s head might have exploded with exaltation. Their Chicago experiment was deemed an instant success, and likely unparalleled since Samuel Rowbotham’s Bedford Level experiment in the United Kingdom, some two centuries earlier.

“It’s flat,” Rick Hummer kept looking into the camera. “It’s flat. It’s flat.”

*It’s flat, Mr. Cooper. It’s flat.*

## MRS. SKIBA

“SHEILA came on board before I did,” Skiba confessed.

Though it is true that Rob was convinced the writers of Scripture *believed* the earth was flat, it is Sheila who ultimately connected the dots between the words they *wrote* and the *testimony* of the Spirit.

She said, “If they believed it, then I do too.”

Skiba laughed over the phone. His wife, he said, had quickly added: “What’s wrong with you?”

## THERE AND BACK AGAIN

FROM somewhere in the radius of 35 nautical miles (or 40 statute miles), video footage depicts Skiba struggling to hold a shaking camera while the city of Chicago darts in and out of its frame. Only his grin is steady. Hummer asks him what he thinks. And barely able to contain his excitement, he says, “It’s not a mirage, I can tell you that.”

“It’s not a mirage,” Hummer repeats.

And then, in his best Schwarzenegger accent, Skiba says: “It’s not a mirage.”

*Get to the choppa. It’s not a mirage!*

Captain Tony will add, “That’s a heck of a mirage right there.”

With the wind pressed upon him, Skiba passes his experimental thoughts into the camera: “I’ve become more and more convinced that what we think is the water obscuring the bottom of ships is the same illusion that we see when we see cars driving out in front of you on a long straight road. It looks like the car disappears wheels first into the road. And it looks like it’s almost going into water. But it’s not. It’s just a mirage. And then when you drive to the same spot of the car that disappeared in front of you, now all of the sudden you disappeared to the guy behind you. So I believe what we may be looking at is an optical illusion. If we want to talk about a mirage,” he then points to Chicago, “that’s *not* a mirage. That’s not a mirage. But when we see things disappear, I think we’re seeing...a mirage like effect of the water. We can see the haze right now at the bottom of the city right there—the haze right now is obscuring the bottom of the city, you can see that right there. But I also think we see the same effect with water—that water can create the same sort of illusion that we’re seeing with the haze right there—obscuring the lower part of the city.”

“It’s definitely a haze over the water,” Hummer adds, “It’s *definitely* a haze.”

Within minutes Hummer holds the camera up to his face while Skiba bends over into his own video equipment behind him. He points his thumb over a shoulder and explains, “Here’s a guy right there, that I do believe is gonna *finally* come out and say,”

he pauses to blink several times, never losing his grin, “It’s *flat*.”

Hummer clearly likes the way that sounds, and so tries it on for size again.

“It’s *flat*.”

He then laughs.

He looks back at Skiba, still glued to his video camera. “He’s a kid in a candy store right now.”

And then once more, “It’s *flat*.”

From 8 nautical miles off the coast of Chicago they no longer feel a need to continue any further. At precisely the halfway mark—that is, halfway between New Buffalo, Indiana and Chicago, Illinois, they have observed Gary, Indiana, 18.9 miles to their south. Meanwhile, the City of Chicago has remained in their sight all the way across Lake Michigan. No need to visit Cloud Gate, that silvery Chicago bean, as contrasting *proof* as to why the surface of water makes a practical flat reflection, rather than an arched one, stretched out and chaotic, like something you’d see in a fun house mirror, nor to run down Michigan Avenue, flapping their arms like crazy mad men, telling everyone the earth is flat. They can do that *later* on the internet. Their day is an unrestrained success. “We saw everything we needed to see,” Skiba says. And besides, they’re late getting back, and fuel is running low. So Skiba sets up his equipment from the rear of their boat so that the city might shrink away, always in frame though, on their return trip across Lake Michigan.

But one more thing, Hummer decides to give his drone a try.

Hummer says, “We were eight miles out when we flew the drone—eight miles from the city of Chicago when we started flying...and one thing we do know for a fact

is that there was a blueish haze above the water that was at least somewhere between eight miles out and the city itself, and that haze actually cut off the bottom of the buildings at the same exact line that you can’t see from the beach in New Buffalo.”

On the trip back, while Captain Tony is hauling it towards Indiana, Skiba can be heard saying, “That’s the proof right here.”

“Absolutely,” Hummer agrees. He’s put on his victory t-shirt, which illustrates Gleason’s AE map and reads, rather appropriately for the occasion, *Leveled Out*. “So, one year ago Rob and I talked about doing this same test, and we said there’s no way you can get a shot during the summer, because it gets too hot, and” he takes the time to look at the city again, “We were *wrong*. You can see Chicago during the summer all the way across the lake.” He looks back again, barely able to contain his grin. “And it’s not a mirage.”

“This is awesome,” Skiba.

“So, what does this mean?” Hummer.

“Well, we found the only piece of water in the whole ball that’s totally flat—because we didn’t go over no hump... It’s not a mirage.”

*Nope*, “It’s not a mirage.”

## 2016

ON the morning of his forty-sixth birthday, Skiba had referred to himself as a Zetetic Agnostic. But that self-assigned title would be abandoned within 8 nautical miles of the Chicago shoreline, dropped without a line and a fishing pole to reel it in. In exchange he returned to Indiana an unapologetic flat earthist—or more precisely, a Biblical earth apologist.



The grin on his face says it all.

*His* was a thesaurus of words which we all *felt*—relief, remedy, alleviation, reprieve. Quite suddenly, for thousands of individuals scattered in isolated pockets across creation, the Chicago horizon unleashed an incalculable circumference of emotion.

In Charleston, South Carolina, I sat alone in a dark room—and cried.

## GOSPEL

“I THINK the original plan was, God wanted to marry this people group—Israel. God was going to deliver them out of bondage in Egypt, and then at Mount Sinai he was going to marry them. That’s why I look at the Ten Commandments as wedding vows.”

Skiba continued, “A friend of mine, Chad Schafer, he said, ‘I don’t think of the Ten Commandments as a *Do* and *Don’t Do* list. I look at the Ten Commandments as an *I Get To* list.’ When you married your wife, you didn’t say, ‘I command you to do this and you can’t do that.’ No, you made promises to her, and she made promises to you. Well, now if you look at it [the Ten Commandments], God says, ‘If you will be my bride, I will become a part of you, and you will become a part of me, and as a result of that, you’re not going to kill people. You’re not going to commit adultery. In other words, if I’m in you and you’re in me, these are things you’re not going to do. And these are the things that you will do. I’m going to be your only husband. And I don’t want you having any other husbands but me—the first commandment.’ If we’re looking at them as wedding vows—if He’s truly in me, then I’m *not* going to do those things that He says not to do, and I *will* do

the things that He says I should do, because that’s Him in me working through me.”

“But what does any of that have to do with the start of the church,” I said.

“The church *began* at Pentecost, but *not* the one in Acts 2,” Skiba said. “The Pentecost at Mount Sinai, *that’s* when the church began. Stephen defines the church as the church in the wilderness. Well, what’s the church in the wilderness? It’s the assembly—it’s the congregation that was at Mount Sinai. Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her. So how did He love and give Himself for something that didn’t exist until 50 days after He was killed?”

“That’s a good point,” I said.

“The church was *already* in existence. And what did Yeshua say? He said I have come only for the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”

“What changed then for the church at Pentecost?” I asked.

“I look at the whole thing as one big marriage issue. The Ten Commandments are given to us in Exodus. But when you get to Leviticus—and I think Leviticus was not really intended as a *Plan A*—I think God’s proposal was for everybody to be king priests. And they were like, *Nope! Moses, you speak for us!* Then there’s the golden calf and basically, the bride cheated on her husband *on* their wedding night. You know, that’s pretty huge. And after that, after Moses smashed the Ten Commandments, God was like, *Okay, if this is how you’re going to work it, this is the way it’s gonna have to be.* And then we get to Leviticus, where you have all these regulations and rules and the Levitical priesthood, and all that. Well, in Deuteronomy chapter 24, one of the laws that is laid out is the law of marriage, where it says, if a husband divorces his wife, and she goes to be with another, and let’s say

that other husband dies or she wants to come back to her first husband, it says the first husband cannot take her back again *because* it's an abomination. Okay, we see throughout the Prophets that God refers to Israel as His bride over and over and over again, but in Jeremiah chapter 3 it says He divorced the northern kingdom."

*Uh-oh.*

"So imagine you are married to God, right?"

"I'm imagining," I said.

"And He divorces *you* because you got caught sleeping around, and then you finally repent. You want to go back to your first husband, who is God, and He's like, *Nope, I can't do it—sorry, it's an abomination. I can't take you back.*"

*That's bad news,* Skiba said.

"And it's also why the Gospel is called the *good news*, which is actually preached in Isaiah. When we think of *good news* we think of the New Testament. Yet when you read the book of Hosea, it's all about how He's going to take her back again. So, now we've got a problem, because Deuteronomy 24 talks about, if you sin and God chastises you, and you don't learn your lesson, then you get seven times more the judgement than you got the first time. Okay, this is very interesting, because the northern kingdom was told to repent, and because they didn't repent, they went into exile. The southern kingdom went into exile for 70 years but they repented and got to go back. Well, there's no evidence that the northern kingdom ever repented. Hosea has this whole thing about them whoring after other gods. So they received a 2730 year sentence. The initial judgement was in Ezekiel chapter 4, I believe, where there was 390 years of judgement, and they didn't repent, having gone into captivity in 720 BC, so they got 2730 years. 2730 years later, seven times

the initial judgement of 390, we come to the year 2009, when all of a sudden, without a leader, without a church denomination, people all over the world decided to go back to Genesis and start over again."

*We should start keeping the Sabbath. We should start keeping the feasts.* Stuff like that.

"Well, what's going on there?" Skiba continued. "Go back to what Jesus said. He said He only came—He only came for the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Now, when you read through the Prophets you see that there's two houses, the house of Israel, also known as Ephraim, and the house of Judah—two houses. Well, he didn't divorce Judah. He divorced Israel. So He's standing in Judea, and He's saying, I've only come for the lost sheep of the house of Israel. What's He doing?"

It would take the Apostle Paul to figure the whole thing out. This is Skiba's pet peeve with certain members of the Hebrew Roots Movement who want to throw Paul out. "When you read from Romans 7-11, he's *quoting* from the book of Hosea. And he's talking to those who know the Law. And then he talks about the husband, *if he be dead, then she is free from the Law*. What law? Well, the law of the husband. So in other words, God marries Israel. He divorces Israel. He can no longer take her back unless He dies."

Skiba added, "That's the greatest love story ever told!"

And this is the problem with the horse blinders of dispensational theology. "As soon as you insert the word *and*, as in the church *and* Israel, then you've completely missed the point. The church *is* Israel. Stephen says it point blank in Acts chapter 7, in his testimony. What Paul tells you in Romans chapter 11, *if you believe in Yeshua, if you believe in Jesus Christ;*

even *if* you're a wild olive tree that has no blood relation to the house of Israel, then you get grafted into the cultivated olive tree, and that's Israel. But Romans 11 is in the context of Romans chapter 7, where Paul repeatedly quotes from the book of Hosea. So if you want to understand who the Gentiles are, because he's an Apostle to the gentiles, he tells you the gentiles are Ephraim, and Romans 7-11, it's the lost sheep of the house of Israel who Yeshua said He was going after. So that begs the question, what is a gentile? Essentially, it's everybody that is out of covenant with God, because the one nation that is *in* covenant with God is the house of Israel. But when he divorced the northern kingdom, they became the gentiles. Well guess what, in the prophecy of Genesis chapter 48, when Jacob blessed Joseph's sons, he prophesied and said that Ephraim would become a multitude of nations. Paul resolves the whole thing in Romans chapters 7-11."

"So, if you're going to call yourself a believer in Yeshua, then you can no longer call yourself a gentile. You can't say, *I'm a gentile believer*, because there's no such thing as an out of covenant in covenant person."

*That*, Skiba said, is an oxymoron.

## CHRISTIAN TALMUD

I HUNG up the phone with Skiba, knowing my yearlong investigation into the Torah movement had come to a swift and sudden, though completely unexpected end. I had brought up the circumcision issue. That was the snowball that started the avalanche for me.

"Is this it...?" I had asked. "If Abraham was saved by faith through grace, then Israel was too. Nothing changed. The Law itself

never brought salvation. It was about circumcising the heart, which would in turn bring about obedience. Circumcising the heart always leads to obedience. The Law was *never* done away with."

From thousands of miles away, it's like I could see Skiba beam with delight, and I might as well have heard a hand clap from his end of the receiver.

"That's it," he said.

My initial phone call in actuality became a series of conversations. He was generous with me as I attempted to wrap my head around my own misconstrued understanding of the Apostle Paul. He was patient and kind while I pulled down the wall of oral tradition—the Christian Talmud—brick by brick. It was a very tall wall. And as I did so, he challenged me to remove any number of bricks by addressing several key points.

How does Scripture define sin?

Could I demonstrate where the dietary laws came to an end in Scripture?

Could I demonstrate when the Sabbath was done away with in Scripture?

Could I demonstrate when the feasts were done away with in Scripture?

I took his challenges to Scripture. The very last puzzle piece fit, and with the completed picture laid out before me, *everything* had changed. Love, grace, and instructions in righteousness won. But this was never about *winning* an argument. It was never about my ego. . It was never about my own ego or religious superiority. There was no reason to pull anyone down into the mud pit of my emotions or succumb to a raging debate of intellectual dominance and arm wrestling. I simply wanted to line up with

the Word. I wanted the intent of Scripture, not my wishful thinking, to be my guide.

“So, circumcise your heart, and stiffen your neck no longer...”

Deuteronomy 10:16

I’ve been a long-time Sunday observer—a long, long, long-time Sunday observer. And then the following day my wife and I walked out of our Independent Baptist church, knowing it would be the final time.

We tried to make it work. We really did.

That *very* Sunday of my initial conversation with Skiba our pastor’s message was about how the Gospels took place in the old religion. Jesus couldn’t possibly have meant so many of His instructions for us. After all, it was a *cursed* old religion, one which the Father may have exacted, but Jesus simply wanted to save us from. It took the Apostle Paul, apparently, not the Prophets, to deliver for us *the new*. No witnesses, not even a written word of prophecy—just Paul’s alibi. It was a perfect murder. We simply couldn’t tolerate the stiff-necked Christian Talmud anymore. We were handing our children over to false doctrine. He was essentially telling his congregation to be disobedient to God and embrace lawlessness.

*Oh yeah*, we landed on the moon too.

We ended that week by throwing out Constantine’s unlawful edict and completing our very first Sabbath—the fourth commandment. A little over a year earlier I had attempted to prove *Torah observers* wrong by using the Bible. In turn, the Bible proved me wrong. And I am so very grateful that it did.

*Thank you*, Rob Skiba, for taking my call.

## A SOCIAL NETWORK OF SPIES

MY phone introduction to Skiba included all that is required by the Geneva Convention. I told him of Billy Collins, something about how I wanted to peep into the windows of his soul, and then added: “About an hour ago one of my best friends said we couldn’t still be friends if I were to call you up on the phone.”

Skiba is a polished speaker. I’d never heard him stumble over his own breath before. It was, for lack of better words, a hell of a way to start a dialogue.

And Bunyan, by the way, was true to his word. On the following morning I logged onto Facebook and learned that our friendship had in fact expired. I was *unfriended*. His alter ego, however—the fake account by which he studied and obsessed over the online quips and phrases of such flat earthists as Skiba, Robbie Davidson, and others (all non-circumstantial evidence) remained. It was as if to lift his hand of providence and proclaim, “You’re one of *them* now,” Kierkegaard’s fools.

“And by the way, I’m watching *you*.”

## AWAKENING

SOME will hail Bunyan as the *true* hero of this story, the only man left in a world shot to hell and a revived *flat earth* movement already gone to Gehenna in a handbasket who still manages the proper dosage of daily Flintstones vitamins. Then again, others familiar with the very name Rob Skiba will immediately recognize the March Hare mating habits or Mad Hatter disease which often seems to materialize whenever one name is paired up with his. Undoubtedly, the man embodies two

worlds, one which is governed and the other which is created. Most want *neither*. Some choose one or the other.

But very few choose *both*.

“Who does Skiba think he is?” So, it goes from *flat earthists* and **Torah observers alike**, something in which they can often both agree upon. “The hubris of this guy—he claims to have it all figured out, while theologians for the last 2000 years had it wrong!”

To his Law detractors, Skiba would refer them to what he intimately calls *the Ephraim Awakening*.

“The Ephraim Awakening explains all of that,” he said. “We were *intentionally* blinded by God for 2730 years. We were *incapable* of seeing the truth.” He’s referring to Leviticus 26 again. “2730 years later, all of a sudden, there’s no other explanation for people all over the world with no leader, with no denominational church building, instigating it, just waking up, independently, all over the world, beginning really in 2009. The worldwide explosion of what has become to be known as this Hebrew Roots movement really began. Paul couldn’t even see until the scales fell off.”

“Look, I don’t claim to have any special revelation, I’m just one of countless millions around the world who realizes *hey*, my Bible doesn’t begin in Matthew and Galatians isn’t the only book in the Bible. It certainly is weird and disturbing that they don’t get it; that eyes aren’t opened; that they’d rather throw Scripture at me than be obedient.” Scripture verses like, “*In that day many will say, Lord, Lord....*”

Skiba is of course referring to Matthew chapter 7, in which Jesus replies to those who claim to have known Him, and served Him, and prophesied in His name, and cast

out demons, and preformed miracles, “And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.’” Skiba is regularly *attacked*, and venomously so, by *flat earthists* who want *nothing* to do with the Law. It is strange logic indeed that Matthew 7:21-23 would a regurgitated round of ammunition, purposed to somehow state that obeying the Law must be what Jesus meant as His new definition of lawlessness, or that Paul would follow similar *logic* by insisting in 2 Thessalonians 2:7 that Law observers are subject to the *mystery of lawlessness*.”

“Well, I think Paul nails it. It’s the carnal mind that’s at enmity with God. You can’t make your living going around lying and slandering people if you think the law is still for today..... If you can throw the Law out, then you can do whatever your carnal mind wants you to do, while pretending to be a Christian.” To this effect he adds, “It ultimately comes down to, they hate God. They *like* Jesus. Jesus is cool. But they want nothing to do with the Father.”

In other words, YHWH delivered a curse, or so the saying goes, while Jesus *freed* them from it. Or as Major Clipton would mutter in *Bridge on the River Kwai*, while observing the carnage, *Madness! Madness!*

“There is *truly* a hatred of the Father to the point where people are saying to obey the Torah is a *doctrine of devils* and akin to the synagogue of Satan. Well, you just called God Satan!” Skiba thought on it some. “They hate Him. They absolutely hate Him. If you love somebody, and they give you a list of things that are important to them, then you honor it.”

It’s that simple.

## TWICE THE DEVIL

MY FELLOW flat earthists will agree with me, the Bible is more literal than any of us ever dared to imagine. Indeed, coming to the knowledge of this intimate revelation has a way of enhancing the joy of our salvation. And the church *mocks* us for it.

Then again, **Torah observers**, whom I now *include* among my fellowship, ironically serve the flip of the coin. Skiba has been banned from HRM conferences simply for believing that Scripture is literally true. In fact, a letter writing campaign, distributed among all so-called leaders of the movement, aimed to keep him from ever taking the stage again. Rob Skiba is a liar, *they say*.

*Rob Skiba is twice the devil.*

“Don’t blame me, blame Moses.” Skiba would have his agitators know. “He introduced it.” And I agree. Why cosmology could possibly be an embarrassment to their *set apart* lifestyle is beyond me. And yet they *hate* Skiba for stating the obvious. “He started the very first chapter talking about it. Go blame him.”

When talk of a public debate between Rob Skiba and Kent Hovind over the issue of Hebrew cosmology began to circulate online sometime in 2018, Dr. Dino made what many would consider yet another odd decision to his rather animated career. He linked arms with Hebrew Roots authority Michael Rood, “someone who has vastly different views of doctrine,” Skiba said, in an attempt “to try and take me down from *both* sides.” It certainly was an interesting strategy, considering Hovind could not win on his own, and he knew it. This flat earth *rebellion*, which has been spreading through **Torah observant** communities like the Bubonic plague,

thanks in great part to Skiba (though in the middle ages, flea infested rats), needed to be crushed. Michael Rood was more than willing to comply.

It backfired miserably.

“You would have to be a complete MORON to take the Bible *literally*,” Rood said in *Flat Earth and the Evolution Conspiracy*. “There are over two hundred and forty-one figures of speech that are used in the Bible, up to 40 varieties under each one of these figures. A brilliant scholar of the past, a rabbi Ginsberg, who was the Hebrew brains behind E. W. Bollinger’s work in *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible*, 1,100 pages cataloging not only the Hebrew, not only the Greek, but the Latin *and* English names of over 240 figures of speech. We have to understand these figures of speech because whenever a word or words fail to be true to fact, true to fact in the census world, they are *always* going to be figures of speech. And these figures of speech have been catalogued, they’re known and every language has different figures of speech that are utilized, and so to understand, to not inaccurately interpret the Word of God, we have to understand that the Bible interprets itself. It does so right in the verse, right where it’s written. It does so in the context, not only in the context of what is written, but also in the cultural context.”

Rood continued, “When you don’t understand figures of speech when you’ve never spent time with 1,100 pages that are readily available in any community; Baker Bible Book House still publishes this—if you don’t want to take the time to do it then you have no qualification to really speak about these things in the Bible.”

So for Rood, a major issue pertaining to flat earthists and our discontent from what has otherwise been disproven is that we don’t understand figures of speech, and just as

importantly, we haven't taken the time to read Bollinger.

On July 8, 2018, Rob Skiba, in many ways an outcast from the **Torah observant** community which he loves, publicly replied. "There's hundreds of figures of speech and E. W. Bollinger who, for many, is an authoritative Bible scholar that people like to reference his work, he's done some great work. I actually love E. W. Bollinger for a number of things. I don't agree with him on everything, certainly not on dispensation theology, which is surprising to me, because he's a hardcore dispensationalist, and Michael Rood is a Hebrew Roots guy, so that's kind of weird. But beyond that, *clearly* Michael didn't do *his* research while he's mocking everybody else. He's mocking everybody because we haven't read Bollinger's work on *figures of speech*."

*Okay, he is—so hear me now.*

"He is touting E. W. Bollinger as an expert on figures of speech and the usage of

figures of speech in the Bible, and he's using this as in the context of saying, anybody who takes the Bible literally when it comes to the shape and nature of the earth in the cosmos is an idiot—is a MORON. And yet E. W. Bollinger, who wrote the book on figures of speech, was a documented flat earther."

Skiba can't help but chuckle.

*Oh man, he sighed, this is awesome.*

Flat earthists all over the world included themselves in that 'sigh'.

From Charleston, South Carolina, I did too.

"Bollinger was a card carrying flat earther, apparently regularly speaking on the topic," a *dispensationalist*—but a flat earthist. "So, the guy who wrote the book on figures of speech in the Bible apparently didn't think circle of the earth was a figure of speech for the globe, because E. W. Bollinger was a *flat earther*."



*My first meeting with Rob Skiba was at the first annual Flat Earth International Conference in Raleigh, North Carolina—2017. The same can be said of Rick Hummer. That would be me with Rick and Matt Long on his left. I'm wearing a t-shirt that says, "CHICAGO, It's not a mirage."*