

## Divine Hitchhikers

“Would you like a ride to town?” said the man to the young hitchhiker. “Sure would”, he answered. “Well, before we get going I need to check the turn signals on my car. Would you get out in front and tell me if they are working?” “Yep”, he answered and went to the front of the car. The man turned on the signals and young guy hollered, “yes—no—yes—no—yes—no”.’

This young hitchhiker must be a Generation Alpha, these young’uns who never learned to drive, and think that all-electric cars save the planet from polluting greenhouse gases because producing electric power on the grid doesn’t require fossil fuels! Well, if people were truly alarmed about the predicted planetary climate apocalypse, then why did former president Obama and family recently buy an ocean front estate? Or why did the current administration’s climate point man John Kerry not so long ago divest himself of his extensive investments in oil companies? Truly if these people were seriously preparing for the end of the world, they would surely be seeking other ways of getting from place to place. Perhaps seeking to commercialize the instantaneous transport described in Acts 8:39-40—Holy Spirit snatching! But trying to make money off of God’s supernatural works is evil in every way. God is holy. His ways are holy. Everything about Him

is holy. The world and its ways are not holy. To even consider trying to monetize anything of God is the height of both arrogance and ignorance. Inexcusable ignorance! Such as what happened earlier in Acts 8 with Simon. But mark my words, in the not too distant future, we will see a profusion of attempts to market God's miraculous signs and wonders, all to ultimately discredit God and to legitimize the antichrist when he arrives on the scene.

Here in Acts 8:26, we meet again one of the original ordained church leaders, the original board of deacons. Quite unlike what we've come to think of as deacons in modern churches, these original deacons were in charge of the "mundane", administrative aspects of the early church. Yet, it's obvious that Holy Spirit has His Own ideas of what and how He wants to use these willing servants of Christ. While the Apostles devoted themselves to prayer and the ministry of the Word, Stephen was called upon to sacrifice his earthly life in witness to the reality of the Deity of Christ Jesus. Called Protomartyr, Stephen was the first official martyr of the church, the prototype of a martyr. Him who would later become the Apostle Paul attended Stephen's stoning to death. Stephen's career as a church deacon was not long at all. And here in Acts 8, Deacon Philip wasn't doing many "deacon" things, either. Philip obviously was given the gift of evangelism. Instructed by Blessed Holy Spirit one day to start off on the road that proceeds south from Jerusalem towards what is now known as the Gaza strip, he set off. Shortly after joining the road, he met

an Ethiopian eunuch, a man of great power and authority, the treasurer of the Ethiopians, whose authority derived directly from the Kandake, the queen of Ethiopia. He was returning to Ethiopia after having gone to Jerusalem to worship.

This incident reveals many things. First there were converts to Judaism, believers in the One True God who lived in the lands south of Egypt, called Ethiopia to this day. They trace their origins almost certainly to the times of King Solomon when his wisdom was so renown around the world that leaders journeyed from far and wide just to hear him. Some of the “lost tribes” of Israel still live in Ethiopia to this day, though many are now returning to the land of Israel to escape persecution and tribal wars with muslim insurgents in the horn of Africa. That the treasurer of Ethiopia had journeyed to Jerusalem to worship God shows just how influential and widespread belief in God was in Ethiopia. He is sitting in his chariot, reading, passing the time on the long trip back home. Studying the Book of Isaiah, he is puzzled by the passages in Isaiah 53. And here entering the scene is Philip. Holy Spirit tells Philip to run alongside of the eunuch’s chariot. He does, and hears the treasurer reading Isaiah 53. Ah, a fellow seeker of God! So Philip asks the man if he understands what he’s reading. To which the treasurer replies, “How can I, unless someone instructs me?”. Fearing nothing from this lone traveler on the road, what with his entourage and military escort waiting to dispatch anyone who might try to harm him, the treasurer invites Philip to join him

in his luxurious lavish chariot. Royalty has always known how to travel in style!

Philip has now become a hitchhiker! A “divine” hitchhiker because he was on assignment from Holy Spirit. The treasurer’s main question had to do with whom was Isaiah 53 referring—Isaiah himself or someone else? Well, Isaiah 53, we know is the chapter that speaks of Christ Jesus as the Suffering Servant Who suffers on behalf of all people who will eventually become saved by Him to eternal life. It’s interesting that Jewish scholars, scribes, and teachers of religious law have always wrestled with the same question the Ethiopian had of this chapter. Various theories have been proposed over the centuries, none of which were correct. Here, led by Holy Spirit, the Final Interpreter of All God’s Word, Philip instructs the treasurer that this Suffering Servant is indeed Christ Jesus, and can be none other. And so, for any and all people, Jews especially, who are open to God’s instruction, the definitive answer to this age-old question is explained in no uncertain terms. And so the Jews who refuse to believe are once again left without excuse.

Well, this Ethiopian Jew was hardly an unbeliever! With Philip’s instruction, he opened his heart and came to know Christ Jesus his Savior right then and there. It just so happened that they came along side a body of water. And the treasurer exclaimed, “Look! There’s some water! Why can’t I be baptized?” And Philip answered, “You can, if you believe with all your heart”.

“The eunuch replied, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God”. And so he ordered the chariot to stop, they both entered the water, and Philip the Deacon baptized the Ethiopian treasurer.

If all this wasn't marvelous enough, as soon as they came up out of the water, Philip vanishes! It says the treasurer never saw him again! But he wasn't worried. Filled with the new presence of Holy Spirit within his own being, the Ethiopian “went on his way rejoicing”. Do you think all this made an impression on his entourage and military escort? You bet it did! Only God knows how many more of them came to saving faith in the weeks and months that followed! This also explains why not long thereafter the Ethiopian Empire was for centuries a Christian kingdom in the horn of Africa.

Back to Philip. He is instantaneously transported to Azotus, back up north, 35 miles away! So he preached the Gospel there and in all the towns along the way until he came to Caesarea. But lest we think that Philip's experience here is unique and one of a kind, the word here used to describe Philip's sudden transport is the same word used to refer to the Rapture. Meaning to be caught up, or caught away, it's what will happen to us when Christ Jesus returns to gather His Church in I Thessalonians 4:17. Then, not only will we be transported a huge distance in no time, we'll also simultaneously be “transfigured”, transformed from mortal to immortal, from worldly finite life to heavenly, eternal life. It also describes the experience of Elijah in II Kings 2 when he was

taken up by God directly to heaven, without physically dying. And again in Genesis 5:24 when it describes Enoch, whom God snatched up to heaven, without Enoch physically dying.

So, depending on exactly when our Lord Jesus the King returns, some of us may yet be physically alive but will be directly snatched up by Holy Spirit to join our Master, Savior and Lord. He will pull us up and out of here! To take leave of this wretched earth! What a glorious day that will be! We can hardly wait!

But if we can hardly wait, really hardly wait, then it would seem that we would, could and should be living our lives right now as if our snatching away could occur at any moment. Which means that we should be living each and every minute of our lives right now such that we would have no regrets about anything. In other words, we are living right now, growing and maturing and becoming more like Christ Jesus, our Living and Life-giving Vine, each and every minute. We're not putting off anything. We're not counting in the back of our minds that, well, we've still got some time left. We can fix this or that, later. We'll deal with this or that sin or "minor" transgression a bit later. We can always confess that later, and put a stop to that pet weakness or indulgence in a little while. But no! As Lord Jesus says, in John 15:5: "Those who remain in Me, and I in them, will produce much fruit". Conversely, in verse 6: "Anyone who does not remain in Me is thrown away like a useless branch and withers". Wouldn't it be great to experience being a "divine" hitchhiker even now?

