

# The Ethiopian and Philip: Acts 8

## A contemporary rendition

by Lewis Payne

*Inspired by an original idea from Rev Pressley Sutherland.*

An angel told Philip to go south to the desert road that runs from Jerusalem to Gaza. So Philip started out on his journey and along the way he met an Ethiopian drag queen, for the sake of argument let's call her Miss Davina Regina. She was tall and dressed in fine fabric and was wearing large gold hoops from each ear and many gold bracelets around each wrist. She was an important government minister, the First Minister of the Treasury, in charge of the economy of Ethiopia and Queen Candance's private fortune. She was important, she was tall, she was beautiful, she was fearsome, and she knew it.

Miss Davina had been in Jerusalem to worship God and on her way home she had been sitting in her Mercedes reading the book of Isaiah. God's spirit told Philip to go to her car and stay near it. Philip was particularly handsome and caught her attention as she drove by. As Philip watched the limo pass he could hear Miss Davina reading aloud to herself.

It was a sweltering day and she had the windows of her car down, to feel what little breeze there was, despite the air conditioning she preferred the freshness of the breeze. It also made it easier for her to see those passing by. The road was crowded, so her chauffeur was taking care not to run anyone over, or dent the beautiful car against the passing cattle. Philip asked her, "Do you understand what you are reading?"

Now, Miss Davina Regina was no fool, in fact she hadn't got to where she was without having a fair bit of common-sense and a good deal of business acumen, and good looks as well. She was well known for striking a hard bargain and being a fierce negotiator. She was also well known for her fondness of young attractive men. She was taken with Philip the moment she saw him. So with her most charming and winsome smile she said to Philip: "Well, how can I understand unless someone explains it to me? Why don't you get in and tell me, honey?"

Philip laughed, as he could see she was flirting with him, but he thought there was no harm in it, so he got into the Mercedes beside her, and the chauffeur drove on. Philip sank into the leather seats. Davina could see he was thirsty, so she poured him a glass of Evian. Then Philip turned to see what she had been reading.

Miss Davina had been reading this passage:

"He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb before the shearer is silent so he did not open his mouth. In his humiliation he was deprived of justice. Who can speak of his descendants? For life was taken from the earth."

And she had been thinking what a strange story this was, and wondering what it could mean. Despite her wealth and power Miss Davina Regina was looking for something more in her life. She was looking for a deeper meaning and she was looking for a place to be accepted. Her rise to power had not been an easy one and she had made a few enemies along the way, the snide comments sometimes echoed in her ears of what they said about her. Her big hands, her big feet and her deep voice. She could take the hard knocks and always fight back with her quick wit, she was not someone to cross, but she was tired. Tired of being the comedy drag queen at all the society events, tired of having to out do the other girls, tired of all the glitter and the glamour. Tired of not being accepted for who she was.

Don't get me wrong, I am all for glamour and glitter, but Miss Davina wanted something else, something more. Miss Davina asked Philip to tell her what the story meant and who was the writer talking about. She was confused and wanted to understand.

Philip began to explain the story, telling how Jesus had been spoken about hundreds of years before by prophets and wise people just like herself, and that how Jesus had lived, died and been resurrected and the good news and liberation of Jesus. He told her about how the stories told of a time when everyone would have a place in God's family - especially those people who had been treated like strangers - transgender people just like Davina.

Miss Davina was overjoyed and she wept. Finally she had found a place to call her own, a place to call home. A place where she could be the person she was and she didn't need to hide or be afraid anymore.

As they travelled together, they came to some water and Davina said "Look, here is a lake. Why shouldn't I be baptised here and now as a symbol of my new start?" And she asked the chauffeur to pull over at the side of the road and they walked down to the lake together.

They both went into the lake and Philip baptised her. When they came out of the water, God's Spirit suddenly took Philip away and Davina could not see him anymore. She was alone, except she was rejoicing that she had found her liberation.

She continued her journey home telling everyone she met of the mysterious handsome stranger and the freedom that Jesus could bring. She was a powerful and influential person and this is how the God's love for all people came to Ethiopia, thanks to a drag queen with big hands and feet called Miss Davina Regina.